

CEMETERY DANCE



SUMMER 1994 / Volume Six, Issue 3

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ENGSTROM**

**MATTHEW
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**NORMAN
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Volume Six, Issue Three
Summer 1994

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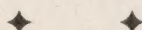
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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

RICHARD T. CHIZMAR

CEMETERY DANCE #21 — Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine of dark mystery, suspense, and horror. If you have picked us up from a book or specialty store and are reading us for the first time . . . we hope you enjoy this issue enough to subscribe or keep an eye out for the Fall Issue due in retail stores just before Thanksgiving.



The August edition of *Cemetery Dance* is almost always the toughest issue of the year to put together. It takes the longest. Is the most complicated. And, generally, is the biggest pain in the you-know-what.

This issue was no exception.

We had writers away on vacation, on book tours, run-down with the summer flu, nursing sick children back to health, tending to messy wasp stings . . . well, you get the idea. And it was the same story with our advertisers, dealers, distributors, and designers.

But here we are just the same. We've got a slightly different line-up for you this time, but it's a good one.

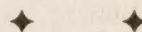
First, we'll cover what's missing: the *Trash Theatre* column (Joe went off on a three/four week signing tour and it wreaked havoc on the man's work schedule, so be nice to him; he needs the rest), the *Spotlight on Publishing* column (it took Bob Morrish quite a few attempts to nail down his interview subject, so the profile will have to wait until next issue), and the *Nightmare Alley* commentary (we've got a great story by Matthew Costello this issue, so we figured we'd hold the column for next issue).

All the rest of the regular columns are here, and in fine form. Plus we have a feature

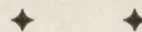
interview with popular author and *CD* favorite, Nancy Collins. (Tyson Blue hoped to have an in-depth talk with Dean Koontz ready to go this issue, but it didn't quite make it—look for it soon!)

Finally, in addition to dark fiction by Matthew Costello, we've got great new tales from the likes of Elizabeth Engstrom, Douglas Clegg, Norman Partridge, Michael Shea, Ed Gorman, and Dan Perez.

One last note: a special thanks to feature artist, Keith Minnion. Keith's work has graced these pages many times before and has always generated very positive comments (from authors and readers, alike). We're lucky enough this time around to feature Keith's fine artwork on the front cover, as well as inside (he did *all* the story illustrations).



Please take note of the "Corrections" listing printed later in this issue. We made (reported) a couple of mistakes last issue and want to be sure to clear them up.



That's all for now. It's time to enjoy the issue. And please remember that Ingram Periodicals is *Cemetery Dance's* newsstand distributor. If you frequent a chain store—yes, *any* chain store—or an independent book or comic store, please ask the manager to carry *Cemetery Dance*. Thanks—we appreciate the help!

Now turn down the lights just a notch, flip the page, take my hand, and start the dance . . .

TYRANNOSAURUS

NORMAN PARTRIDGE

NORMAN PARTRIDGE recently won the Bram Stoker Award and was a finalist for the World Fantasy Award (for Best Short Story Collection). His debut novel, *Slippin' Into Darkness*, sold out quickly in hard-cover and was quickly snapped up by a mass-market paperback publisher for a 1995 release. The following story packs a powerful punch . . . to the heart.

She sat in the back of the police car. The deputy sat up front, his face too white in the harsh glow of fire engine headlights. Her ex-husband's car stood in stark silhouette between the two county vehicles. With its trunk sprung open, the scorched Honda reminded her of a dinosaur skull.

Jaws open wide, ready to snap.

Tyrannosaurus, the killer dinosaur. That was the one it resembled.

"Can't we do this in the house?" she asked. "It was self-defense. You have to believe that. If I hadn't ended it tonight, he would have come back again."

"We have to get your story, Mrs. Rose."

"I changed my name after the divorce. It's Janet Perkins."

"Okay, Ms. Perkins."

"Can't we do this inside? I want to see my son."

"It won't take long. Really. Just a few questions. And it has to be done."

"Okay ... Okay. Let's get it over with."

"The man in the Honda is your ex-husband?"

"Right. I told your boss that the bastard would come after us. Parole. What a stupid idea. After what he did to Sean in that motel room, and the threats he made—"

"Sean? That's your boy's name?"

She nodded. "And I hate to admit it, but Jack Rose was Sean's father."

"You say that Rose made threats—"

"Not recently. A tabloid reporter got under his skin before the trial. Jack exploded—just verbally, but an explosion nevertheless. He wised up after that, especially when he went in front of the parole board. But how they could look at the pictures of Sean in the burn ward and let Jack out of jail, especially when he'd made those threats ... It just doesn't make sense."

"Yeah. I remember the story. I followed it in the papers. How brave your boy was, undergoing all those

skin graft operations. I want to tell you, that's real bravery."

"Thanks. He's a tough kid."

The deputy nodded. "Why don't you take me through what happened tonight, step by step, and then we'll see where we go from there."

She looked through the window. A light mounted on the fire engine scanned the gravel driveway. The tire still lay to one side of the charred Honda, half hidden by the tall weeds that bordered the driveway. The jack lay next to it. So did the empty gas can. Firemen scurried around, their faces masked against thick black smoke.

"I'm glad the windows are up," she said. "The smell must be—"

"Let's talk about tonight."

"Okay." She took a deep breath. "I finished work at seven. I'm a bartender at the Iron Horse, and the boss takes over for the night shift."

"That's a long commute. Why don't you live in town?"

"Part of the plan. First I changed my name, then I went rural. I figured it would be tougher for Jack to find us out here in the boonies. Besides, I like it here. We've got a few neighbors, and they watch out for us."

"But what about Sean? Didn't you worry about leaving him alone?"

"Sean's independent. I'm not raising him to hide like a bug under a rock. He doesn't want to live that way and neither do I, though sometimes I get so scared that I want to start running again." She sighed. "I just can't give in to that fear, though. It's hard enough on Sean—getting around in a wheelchair, looking the way he does—without me trying to mother-hen him."

"Yeah. I see what you mean."

"Anyway, it was almost dark by the time I got home. I saw Jack from the road. I blocked the driveway with my truck. Then I got my .38 out of the glove box and headed after him. I've got a permit for the gun."

"Where was he?"

"Let's see—I heard the Honda's trunk slam as I got out of the truck ... Yeah. Jack was behind the Honda. He'd parked it on the far side of the barn so Sean couldn't see him from the house. I guess he'd just finished changing the tire, because I saw the flat lying in the weeds near the driveway. The jack was there,



too. There was a gas can in between, with the lid still on it. It was just dumb luck. If Jack hadn't had the flat, he would have torched the house with Sean in it and been out of here before I showed up."

"Did Jack see you coming?"

"Yes, but I shot him before he could do anything. In the shoulder." She smiled. "I'm a good shot."

"Just wounded him?"

"Right. He got in the car and started the engine. That's when I shot the front tires. I hope I got the one he'd changed." She sighed. "Then I walked up to him, keeping the gun aimed at his head the whole time."

"How did he react?"

"He laughed. Called me Sigourney Weaver. Said that I might as well go call the cops. Then he started making promises again."

"More threats?"

She nodded. "He said that he'd be back, that they probably wouldn't even lock him up this time because he hadn't done anything but violate the restraining order. Then he got back to the old stuff. How he'd burn down the house some night while we were asleep. Look, I just couldn't take it anymore."

"That's when you shot him the second time?"

"Right. I'd rather not say where."

"We don't have to go into that right now."

"Good. Anyhow, I turned away, and when I saw that gas can lying there I really lost it. I grabbed it. Jack saw me coming and tried to get out of the car, but I shot through the door. Hit him again. I don't know where, but it hurt him bad, because he started to cough up blood." She shrugged. "That's when I heard the sirens—I guess someone reported the gunshots—but they didn't stop me. I opened the can and poured gas all over him. He just sat there, grinning that crazy grin of his. Look, I don't have to describe the rest of it, do I?"

"No." The deputy stared at the Honda.

She looked at it, too, but saw only tyrannosaurus jaws. "It was self-defense. He really would have come back."

The deputy nodded.

"Can we go inside now?"

"In a minute," the deputy said.

Outside, the night was alive with the sound of machinery. She watched as a fireman opened the dinosaur's brainpan with some kind of gas-powered saw. Her ex-husband was inside, burnt and shriveled. A man took photos of the corpse, then of the gas can and the tire. A van drifted by, long and white, silent and slow.

"Your ex-husband lied to you," the deputy said.

"About not doing anything tonight, I mean."

She swallowed, her throat suddenly dry.

The deputy sighed. "The other time, the first time, Rose took Sean somewhere before he hurt him. A motel, you said. Right?"

She didn't answer.

"Those Japanese cars have awfully small trunks. The tire you saw—it wasn't flat. And the jack and the gas can—Rose wasn't using them. He had to get everything out of the trunk. He had to make room ... for the wheelchair ... for ..."

The deputy's voice cracked.

Sean's mother started to cry.

"Near as we can tell, Sean was gagged. He couldn't cry out." The deputy couldn't look at her. "Rose lied to you, Ms. Perkins. Remember that. You couldn't have known."

Long and white, silent and slow, the coroner's van rolled past the police car.

But the monster's skull remained.

— CD

CORRECTIONS

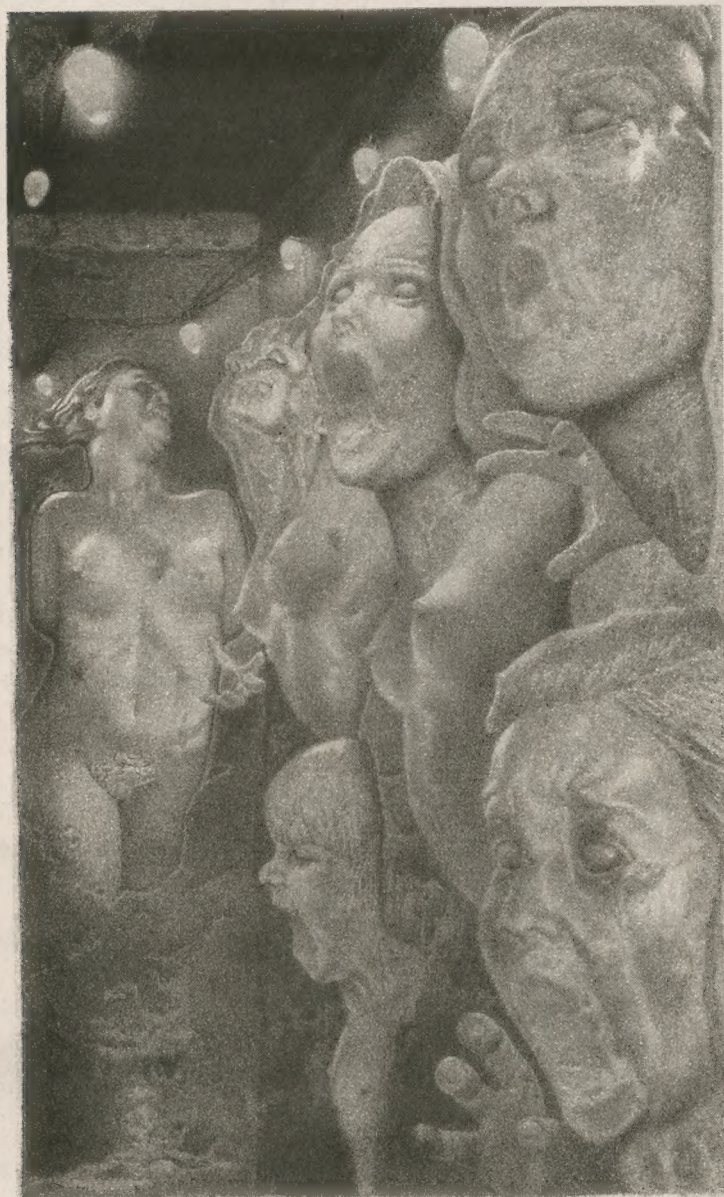
Correction #1: In last issue's "Letters To The Editor," it was suggested that *Night Letters* columnist Douglas E. Winter may have somehow erred in a use of the word "project." Any error is that of *Cemetery Dance's* typesetters. Doug Winter's original manuscript used the word "product" and read: "Hence we find ourselves surrounded by artists and entertainers who, like Dean R. Koontz or New Line Cinema with its interminable *Nightmares on Elm Street*, are nothing less than manufacturers, whose redeeming virtue is not so much quality as quality control—the ability to deliver not necessarily great, not even necessarily good, but simply consistent product year after year after year."

Correction #2: It was mistakenly reported (in the last issue of *Cemetery Dance*) that the DAW annual edition of *Year's Best Horror Stories* was being discontinued. Editor Karl Edward Wagner wrote us to say: "Can't think why then they'd sent me a contract and advance. This is the third year running that this rumor has been spread. Not true. *YBHS* is alive and well . . ."

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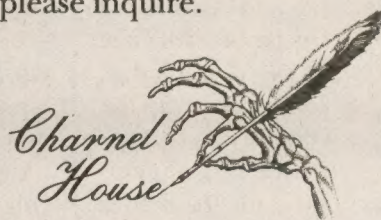
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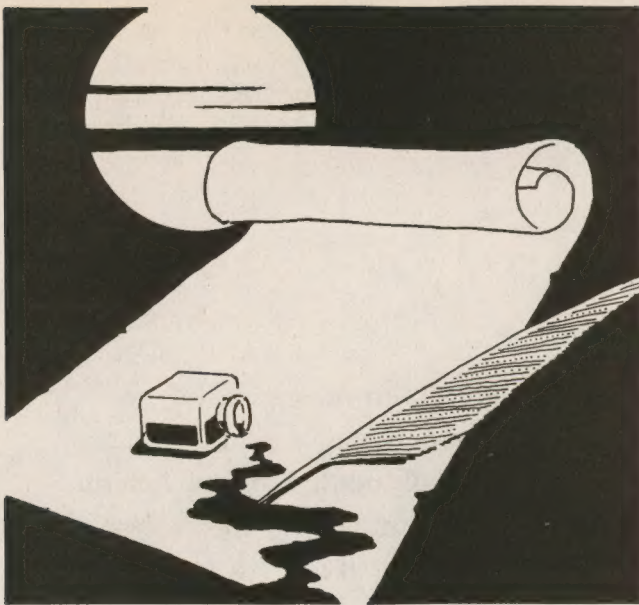


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DOUGLAS E.
WINTER

NIGHT LETTERS

From the Teeth of Angels

*So . . . so you think you can tell
Heaven from Hell,
Blue skies from pain.
Can you tell a green field
From a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil . . .
Do you think you can tell?*

Just when you've shuffled through stacks of meaningless books — the incredibly exciting lives of lawyers, sullen ripoffs of *The Dark Half*, stupefying romances set in Iowa — along comes Jonathan Carroll to remind you that words have wisdom, that the best fiction offers an avenue of escape that inexorably brings us home, informed and sometimes transformed. His new novel, *From the Teeth of Angels* (Doubleday, hardcover, \$22.00), takes on the weighty opponent of death with comfortably cultured, sucker-punch prose that leads the reader into temptation, damnation and, in time, redemption. It is the culmination of a loose sequence of books (*The Land of Laughs*, *Sleeping in Flame*, *A Child Across the Sky* and others) and it is probably the best of Carroll's novels.

The prelude, written in the form of a letter — the first of sundry

missives, tapes, telephone calls and asides around which this novel is constructed — rambles on about a European holiday before telling doomed meta-hero Wyatt Leonard the story of an otherwise tedious Englishman who claims to have met Death. The Reaper, it would seem, descends into this man's dreams, wearing the face of a long-dead friend. The Englishman asks questions of Death but suffers vicious wounds when he does not understand the answers. And thus the stage is set for a remarkable masque.

Wyatt, who once charmed America as a children's television host, is dying, a victim of leukemia — or, perhaps, of believing too intensely: "Terminal hope." Inevitably he, too, will greet Death — in dreams and in daylight — as Carroll whirlpools us toward the ageless enigma, the one question that each of us, at one time or another, would like to ask of Death: Why?

Wyatt's not-so-shining path to wisdom entwines with that of Arlen Ford, a film star who has gone Garbo, fleeing to Vienna at the height of her fame and finding there the kind of tranquility that can only summon chaos. As quiet

desperation — and Wyatt, a friend from Hollywood days — steal into her monastic existence, she falls in love with photojournalist Leland Zivic, dour chronicler of the horrors of war, whose camera now watches over the evisceration of Yugoslavia.

Carroll shows us that death is everywhere, casting its grey shroud over the lives of the innocent and the guilty with indiscriminate gusto. But his novel is a celebration of life — and not the life of hollow heroes, celluloid dreams. Though at first glance Carroll has assembled a cast straight out of glamour fiction or a Lubitsch film, the fame of his characters is essential to the drama. Each has played out a role, lived a prior "life," and now they are pale ghosts who, like Death, converse with the living, painfully aware that their former existence, a false existence, could not protect them from the essential fact: "Everything you want in life has teeth."

As Carroll spins out story after story, stories within stories, level upon level of this thing we call reality is stripped away until only that common denominator, the great leveler Death, remains.

Along the way, he makes us care, and care intensely, for these people, for the shadowed valleys through which they walk, fearing every kind of evil. Although his finale seems abbreviated, perhaps that is only because of the strength and substance of what has gone before. Certainly he has proved that the epistolary novel lives, not as some quaint and creaky device but as a vivid, contemporary storytelling technique.

I've met the elusive Jonathan Carroll, who has lived most of his adult life in Austria, at gatherings intended to celebrate the curious notion that there is a particular kind of fiction known as "fantasy." Although he has won the World Fantasy Award, his writing gives the lie to any thinking that would separate our reality from a fiction in which the unreal can and does occur.

Even his publisher has difficulty defining his books — witness the comparisons to Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Stephen King and . . . Harpo Marx? This is a good sign. Jonathan Carroll keeps us guessing. Like his take on *Death*: Just when we think we know the answers, he changes the questions.

But perhaps, in playing the name game, these comparisons offer a serendipitous clue, for if there is a thread linking these otherwise disparate personalities, it is magic — and there is great magic in *From the Teeth of Angels*. Carroll's words are like those colorful scarves, knotted and cut by stage magicians to unleash the white doves of wonder — and, on occasion, that flash of light and great grey puff of smoke that mark *The End*.

Moving in ever-inescapable circles, *From the Teeth of Angels* reaches a conclusion that I cannot, in fairness, reveal in print. I will say only that it "got" me — with all the frisson of Hitchcock's shower scene — and in that swift and sudden moment Carroll achieves the kind of transcendence that most

writers only dream about. We struggle mightily to break through the barrier of language, to overcome the inadequacy of words to touch our readers' hearts. Fiction can give meaning to our times — to life in the midst of death — and Jonathan Carroll has done that here.

† †

Try. By Dennis Cooper (Grove Press, hardcover, \$20.00). This deadpan take on teenage insecurity, unbridled desire and heroin is a major disappointment from Cooper, whose unblinking *Frisk* (1991) will rank as one of the classic horror novels of the nineties. In offering the story of a befuddled high schooler with sexually abusive gay parents, an uncle who produces child pornography and a best friend who is a junkie, Cooper strives to suggest a profound emptiness of the human spirit that summons some primal need for possession. With a brutal style that leaves nothing to the imagination, he manages merely to render disgust into tedium, creating a wholly amoral fiction that can only leave the reader feeling like a scapegoat. What would have worked stunningly as a short story is punishment at novel length, and even Cooper's razorsharp prose cannot save the day.

† †

Street. By Jack Cady (St. Martin's Press, hardcover, \$19.95). Here is cause for celebration: a new Jack Cady novel. With his distinctive, elegiac style, Cady reinvents the familiar story of a gender-bending serial killer as a five-act tragedy enacted by the homeless. But that's not all: the narrator is part actor, part schizophrenic, shifting roles and point-of-view as the novel progresses. The result is a tour-de-force of storytelling — not a page-turner, but the kind of book whose prose should be savored.

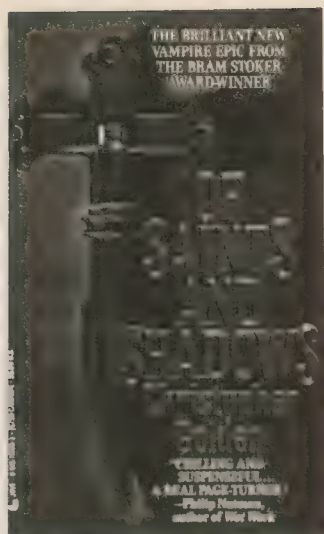
With *Street* and his recent World Fantasy Award for best fiction collection, perhaps Jack Cady will at last obtain the wider recognition from the reading public that he so clearly deserves.

† †

The Return of Count Electric & Other Stories. By William Browning Spencer (Permanent Press, hardcover, \$22.00). Look carefully for this stunning story collection, which, although packaged to avoid genre connotations, is horror fiction of the highest caliber. With sublime irony, mainstream reviewers have cheered Spencer because his tales, unlike those of contemporary "literary" fiction, actually have a beginning, middle and end. The voices, motifs and sheer will of his stories are exceptional: The title piece resurrects a serial killer whose signature is a mysterious electrical implement; "Looking Out for Eleanor" portrays a woman whose innocence is the equivalent of evil; and "Haunted by the Horror King" concerns a writer tormented by — who else? — Stephen King. Highly recommended.

† †

Of Saints and Shadows. By Christopher Golden (Jove, paperback, \$5.99). First novels — at least those by conscientious writers — are a blessed event. A novelist rarely emerges into print with full maturity — even Dan Simmons's renowned premiere, *The Song of Kali*, offered but a glimpse of the awesome talents that would grace later books. When we hold a first novel in our hands, we must remember that, more often than not, it is a career striving to take flight; while not exempt from criticism, these books deserve respect — and a little slack — from both readers and reviewers. Which brings us, in a roundabout fashion, to *Of Saints and Shadows*, the first novel by the



editor of the Stoker Award-winning *Cut! Horror Writers on Horror Film*. Although yes, it is yet another vampire novel, and one that stumbles in its early going, *Of Saints and Shadows* emerges as a delightful read and a noteworthy debut by a writer who cares passionately about the stuff of horror. The first book of a saga, it supplants the traditional intimacy of the *nosferatu* genre with a politico-religious thriller reminiscent of the recent novels of David Morrell. Harrowing, humorous, overflowing with characters and plot contortions, this novel is abundantly entertaining and, more important, a portent of great things to come from Christopher Golden.

† †

Casebook on Alternative 3: UFOs, Secret Societies and World Control. By Jim Keith (IllumiNet Press, P.O. Box 2808, Lilburn, GA 30226, trade paperback, \$12.95). In 1977, the British television program "Science Report" presented its own version of Orson Welles's famous "War of the Worlds" radio hoax, offering a "documentary" exposé of "Alternative 3" — a sinister conspiracy among the ruling elite to escape a doomed Earth and colonize the moon and Mars. Although the program, and a subsequent paperback by Leslie

Watkins and David Ambrose (Sphere, 1978), were obvious blather, several conspiracy "researchers" have pondered whether a kernel of truth was to be found inside the spoof. In *Casebook on Alternative 3*, one of the few lucid and engaging writers on the subject of conspiracy, Jim Keith, swiftly debunks the hoax and then pursues its possibilities in a series of thought-provoking and, at times, unsettling essays. Unlike most buffs, Keith has no apparent agenda, save to urge his readers to look at the world in different ways, and he is quick to admit to conjecture or the frailty of evidence; the result is the most cogent (and occasionally convincing) exploration of "secret history" in recent memory.

† †

Killing for Culture. By David Kerekes and David Slater (Creation Books, 83 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1 5RJ, England, trade paperback, £10.95, \$19.95). The subtitle says it all: "An Illustrated History of Death Film from Mondo to Snuff." In this compulsively readable study, Kerekes and Slater investigate "the marketing of outrage" — the proliferation of images of *real* death in contemporary cinema and television. The book surveys feature films — from *Peeping Tom* to the infamous *Snuff* to *Man Bites Dog* — and then provides an invaluable study of "mondo" movies and "shockumentaries" before entering the realm of actual death. With a focus on the elusive "snuff" film (which, although a staple of fiction and antiporn propaganda, has no factual precedent), the authors examine the human fascination with the visual recording of death, and the curious power of the camera to make this dire event seem somehow more than real. As Kerekes and Slater note so well, "Film doesn't simply document, it creates."

† †

The Seduction of the Gullible. By John Martin (Procrustes Press c/o On Line Publishing, P.O. Box 134, West PDO, Nottingham NG7 7BW, England, trade paperback, £11.99). This disjointed but disturbing history of the British "video nasty" phenomenon, which saw more than 50 horror films banned by the usual suspects — political ambition and media manipulation — is about the best evidence that it *can* happen here short of a personal visit from Donald Wildmon, Catherine MacKinnon or a fellow stormtrooper of your choice. Martin's chronological dissection of the moral panic that gripped England in the early 1980s (and that now threatens to unleash the censors again) is the real meat of this book, but unfortunately is presented second, after capsule reviews of the "nasties" that are often so condescending that the reader may wonder why he or she should care. What happened in England has since happened in Canada, and if you haven't been paying attention, folks . . . it's happening here.

† †

Horror and Violence: The Deadly Duo in the Media. By Phil Phillips and Joan Hake Robie (Starburst Publishers, P.O. 4123, Lancaster, PA 17604, trade paperback, \$10.95). This shrill tirade from folks who not only have the true religion but insist that everyone else have it, too, is a companion volume to *Halloween and Satanism* and "another best-seller" known as *Turmoil in the Toy Box* (which explains that many of today's playthings are "occultic" and have their roots in Hinduism, Ba'hai and — gasp! — Zen Buddhism). Although the main target is television, purveyor of "Saturday Morning's Smorgasbord of Violence" — in other words, *He-Man* cartoons and professional wrestling — we also learn that "[i]n a terror film sex is never shown as making love in the

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context of a Godly relationship.”
Hmm. Interesting commentary
from folks whose favorite book is
about a man who was flogged,
crowned with thorns, nailed to a
cross and gutted with a spear.

† †

Bled to Death: Horror Eats Itself. By
Chas. Balun (Chunkblow Press,
8456 Edinger Avenue, Suite 111,
Huntington Beach, CA 92647,
\$5.00). In this self-published chap-
book, gore film aficionado Balun —

editor of *Deep Red* magazine and
author of several viscera-based
viewing guides — offers a breath-
less, bitter and for the most part
accurate indictment of the woeful
state of horror film in the 1990s.
Conspicuous by its absence from
the fingerprinting is the gore-for-
gore’s sake mentality that Balun
himself championed for so many
years; but this is nevertheless a
heartfelt broadside from a man
who truly cares about what has hap-
pened to horror movies. Read it
and weep.

† †

Next issue: Anne Rice.

*Lyrics by Roger Waters © 1975 Pink
Floyd Music Publishers Inc. This col-
umn is dedicated to the memory of
James Blair Lovell.*

Douglas E. Winter
Alexandria, Virginia
July 1994

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ED
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Even as a young boy, I knew there was something different about them, as a breed I mean.

I suppose their places of business said it all. Dingy, dusty places, rat holes and sinkholes and holes-in-the-wall, the last vestiges of Dickens in a variety of small Midwestern cities just at the end of the smug fifties, and the beginning of the aggrieved sixties.

I have probably known, to a greater or lesser extent, fifty of them and every one of them was a misfit of one sort or another.

I'm talking about people who own used book stores.

Now understand, I'm a misfit myself, always have been, always will be. Takes one to know one.

So I'm not calling them a name I would not call myself.

Yet and still—

Certain occupations seem to attract certain personality types. This is in my experience, of course, and very subjective.

For example.

The people I knew who became cops were not the stereotypical bullies of paperback novels but, curiously enough, the rather quiet, reasonably bright, very conservative boys and girls that a nun could always trust to behave when she

was called out of the room briefly.

Real estate people develop along gender lines. Quietly anxious women seem to gravitate to this calling, while the men tend to be the slick but hollow sort who ran unsuccessfully for student senate and always tell you at class reunions how much their IRS returns were the year previous. They usually have mistresses who cry a lot.

Now used bookstore owners.

I've found that an amazing number of them are illiterate—i.e., cannot, at least verbally, construct a grammatical English sentence.

Some can't even exactly read. One lady continues to call Stephen King "Stefan King" while her friend usually refers to "Dean Kontz." (Don't ask me.)

And forget about posting WASH YOUR HANDS signs in their johns.

Outside of gas stations, used bookstores seem to have the dirtiest toilets on the entire planet. I've even known a few where the toilets didn't flush properly and where the smell leapt at you as soon as you entered the bookstore.

Then we have the matter of how the books are arranged. It is not surprising in such places to find Edgar Rice and William Burroughs side-by-side. Recently, I

even saw sixties Black Panther figure H. Rap Brown sitting next to lily-white romance novelist Sandra Brown. I'm sure you have your own favorite tales of misfiled books.

I went to one store where books were simply thrown up on the shelves with no regard whatsoever to type or category—SF with western, romance with tips on reupholstering your couch. I asked the guy why he did this and he said, "I sell more books this way. Forces people to look through my stock." Right. I stayed about two minutes. What it forced me to do was walk out his door.

Some people seem to buy bookstores so they can inflict their literary opinions on people. Nobody else will listen to them, but by God, when they've got customers in there, they've got a captive audience.

I don't mind when a store owner recommends this or that book to a customer but when he brays his opinions as to the worth of many of the books he's selling—No thanks. It's one thing to recommend, another to pontificate.

One day I saw a customer get so sick of hearing the store owner's opinion (there was nowhere in his tiny store to escape his voice) that

the customer went over to the wastecan and threw away all the books he'd planned to buy. "You're a loudmouth, anybody ever tell you that?" he said. He was real real mad. He stormed out. The owner, of course, learned nothing from this. "What a jerk," he said as the customer slammed the door.

Then there was the store that never kept regular hours—you had to drive across town and take your chances.

And then there was the store that always cheated you on your credit.

And the store that featured the folk-singing co-owner who sang even more off-key than Judy Collins.

And the store owner who went to The Writer's Workshop and managed to work that fact into every dull sentence he uttered.

And there was—

So are there any used bookstores I've enjoyed going to?

Oh, sure.

Lots of them. Nothing is more fun than turning up the Gold Medal you don't have, or the mint condition copy of *Rogue Moon*, or the Robert Bloch Ace Double you've been looking for for years. I go to used stores frequently and generally enjoy myself. Most of the owners are nice, too.

But of all my used bookstore memories, two people come most vividly to mind.

There was one guy I called Benito (after Mussolini) because he could rant even longer and louder about politics than I can.

Benito was a psycho.

Literally couldn't tell the difference between fantasy and reality.

Got a speeding ticket once and was so angry that he just started inventing stories about the Cedar Rapids Police Department.

Week after week we listened to the fruits of his invention.

His best story was the one I called The Mysterious Disappearances and it would have made a great segment on "Unsolved Mysteries."

According to the store owner, the Cedar Rapids cops were killing one or two people a week and then dumping their bodies in the Cedar River ... and nobody knew it was going on!

That was the day I couldn't help myself. I laughed out loud. "You mean, like a death squad?"

"Exactly."

"How many people you think they've killed?"

"From what I've heard, maybe twenty, twenty-five."

"And nobody knows?"

"They throw 'em in the river."

I don't know where Benito went but there's at least a possibility that he was working with Hilary Clinton on the Clinton Health Care plan. He had the right kind of mind for it.

The other used bookstore owner I liked was sixty-two years old, stood at best five-two, weighed two hundred pounds and had a heart condition.

Mrs. Miller, God love her.

Long, long ago I sold a story to a terrible men's magazine (my check for \$15 should tell you all you need to know about both the magazine and my story). Mrs. Miller went out and bought two copies of this particular issue. One she took home, after having me autograph it, and the other she kept in her drawer at the bookstore.

I became her one and only tourist attraction.

Whenever I was in there, and things were a little slow, she'd say to a customer who didn't know me, "That guy over there? He's an author."

And out would come the

magazine.

And the customer would have to pretend to be utterly impressed with my having a story in *Tits Ahoy!* or whatever the magazine was called.

I'm not quite sure why I liked her. She was something of a racist, could be owly as hell for extended periods of time, had absolutely no taste in fiction, and talked so loud and so fast you could barely concentrate on looking for books.

And yet like her I did. There was a weird crazed working-class sweetness to her at her best, and a kind of beleaguered wisdom, too. I was twenty years old at the time and unmarried and broken-hearted and just drifting on booze and anger but whenever she'd sense I was too far down, out would come *Tits Ahoy!* which she'd wave in my face and say "How many other guys your age have done somethin' like this?"

She had two heart attacks and the doctor said absolutely quit smoking and absolutely quit drinking bourbon and absolutely quit eating sweets.

She was in her bookstore one warm April day—I wasn't there but I heard about it—chain-smoking and sneaking a drink from her flask when her head fell down to her desk. And she was dead.

She's been dead nearly thirty years now. The day they urban-renewaled her block I went over to watch them tear down her house and I got all sentimental about her and the old neighborhood and how things were back then and how life turns out so strangely and unpredictably even when it's being good to you. Dickens would have loved Mrs. Miller. And understood her with that "great public heart" of his as Graham Greene called it.

Dickens would have loved her.

Blood Moon



Ed Gorman

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THE CABINET-MAKER'S WIFE

DOUGLAS CLEGG

DOUGLAS CLEGG is the author of several popular horror novels, including the most recent *Dark of The Eye* (Pocket Books). This creepy tale is his third appearance in *Cemetery Dance*, and other short stories are slated to appear shortly in Ellen Datlow's *Little Deaths* and Poppy Z. Brite's *Love In Vein*.

1.

She had been raised to be somewhat old-fashioned, and she made no apologies to anyone for it. Linda had her hobbies, and reading, and although she was still fairly young (just turned thirty-two), she had no interest in getting out into the world much, preferring instead to stay home and cook and read, or, in the spring, to walk through the woods. She had known no other man, and was devoted to her husband, who was an artist of sorts who designed and made furniture. Linda's husband, Stephen, liked to work in oak best, but only when it came to furniture, for the cabinets he was best-known for were done in pine. His finest piece of work was the wardrobe he'd made for Linda on the eve of their wedding. It was made from knotty pine, and had a top shelf within its cupboard, and six drawers on one side, with a place to hang things on the other. On the outside he'd carved some beautiful designs—birds and baskets of fruit with grape vines dangling between. But every piece of furniture in the house was hand-made—the corner display cabinet in the dining room, the secretary in the den, the cocktail cabinet, the linen chest, the chiffonier in the bedroom. He was such a talented man, and his business used to just thrive, but then the economy had dived and, well, no one really needed hand-carved expensive furniture when they couldn't make a house payment. So he had begun brooding, again, as he had when she'd first met him in his late teens, brooding because there was nothing to keep his hands occupied. He continued working, for a while, on cabinets and chairs and other furnishings, but he'd had to store the excess down below, in the crawlspace basement in order to have room in the house just to sit.

And it was to that place, beneath the oriental rug that covered the trap door to the basement, that Linda went in search of a little corner chair, something small enough for a child—her sister had just had a baby, and

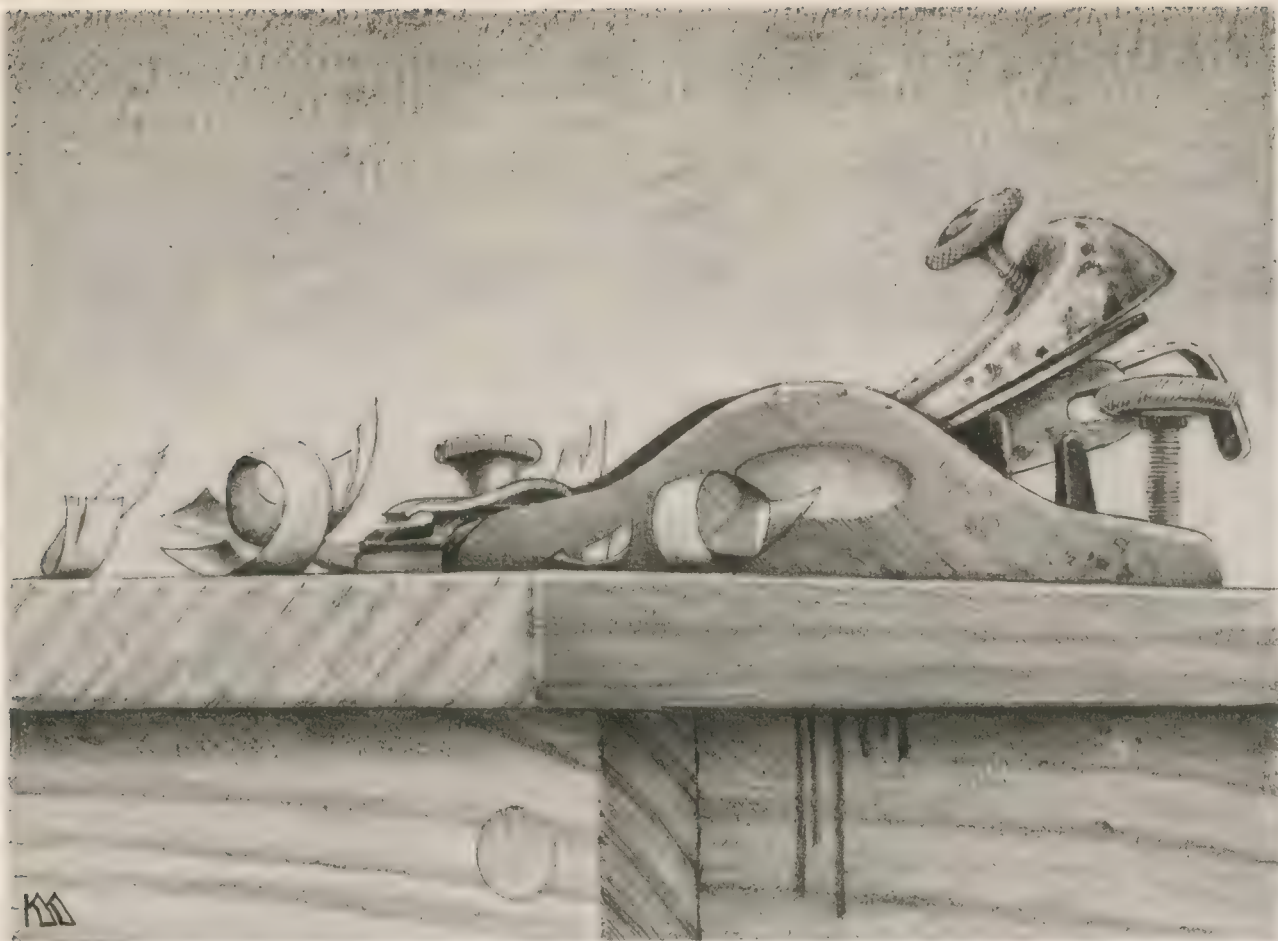
she wanted to send along some token. It wasn't much, but it was sturdy and made from white pine, and when the baby was two or three, he would be able to go sit in it.

She rolled the rug back, and had to get a screwdriver to lift the wooden trap. It was heavier than she had remembered—usually she would call Stephen for some help, but he was out of earshot at the moment. She managed to slip her fingers beneath the flat wooden trap, and with a great heave, shoved it off onto the dark wood floor.

She didn't enjoy going down there, for it was a place of filters and the hot water heater and the storage furniture, a place where skunks sometimes crawled into and let off a terrible stink. Linda was not fond of spiders, and it was winter—there would be webs near the heater. She took a small flashlight with her, and a broom, and slid down through the square opening. When her feet touched the cold concrete floor, she ducked down and turned on the flashlight. There, in the middle of the room, was a single naked bulb, its flayed string hanging. She stepped around an over-turned dresser and pulled on the string. The bulb gave feeble light, but it was enough to look around. She thought she heard some scuffling over near the enormous boxes that Stephen kept for no good reason, and turned her flashlight on them.

Nothing. No skunks in evidence, no spider webs, for that matter.

She glanced about at the cloth-shrouded forms: the tables and chairs and dressers. Where would it be? That adorable little chair, that little doll chair of a type that had once been so popular with Stephen's customers ... It smelled like a dead animal, just a bit, as she moved across the room, keeping her head tucked under, lest she hit it against the low ceiling. There was a noise, too, not the scuffling she thought she'd heard, but a steady tap-tap-tap like a faucet dripping, or the tattoo of some dull object, a rock, say, or a book, against another. There was an enormous chest next to the hot water heater, and this seemed to be the source of the sound. The chest was a prize; it was originally commissioned for a family of six, and it would be used to store their treasures, but the family reneged, and Stephen was stuck with something that he couldn't possibly use.



There was that tap-tap-tap sound again.

She knew she should go get Stephen, but he had been brooding so much, she hated to bother him over what was possibly only a rat or squirrel.

Could it have gotten stuck in the chest?

She shined the flashlight all over the area around it—the dust had been disturbed, and the dropcloth had been drawn tight around the chest, rather than just thrown over it as had been done with all the others. Unlike Linda, Stephen was rather sloppy in his habits, meticulous as he was in his work.

Some animal had come in through the low casement windows and had gotten into the chest.

But the cloth was so tight around the chest, it was as if someone had tucked the chest in with it.

She took a step forward in her stocking feet, the cold of the floor now feeling like hot coals, for she was frightened easily by things. Animals could terrify her, dogs and cats, but also wild things like skunks and squirrels and rats. The basement was normally Stephen's domain, although she had come down here once before to re-light the hot water heater and had seen a nest of spiders. Linda was timid, this she knew, and even the thought that she might find a dying rat huddled against the beautiful mahogany, among cedar chips, made her wish she was somewhere else. What

if it bit her?

Like a shock, Stephen said, "Here, what're you doing?"

Linda turned about—he was kneeling above the trap opening, his head upside down, his hair hanging straight—he needed a cut, she didn't like him looking too shaggy and unprofessional. "I'm looking for that chair. The doll chair. For Susie's baby."

"It's in the garage, you knew that," he said, his voice accusing her of what he liked least about her: her snoopiness.

"I looked there. Trust me, if I didn't have to, I wouldn't come down here at all," she said, relieved that he was here with her, in spite of that tone in his voice.

"It's in the garage, Linda," he repeated. It was his sour mood. A man could only go without work so long before going a little crazy. He had turned from boy genius to middle-aged babyface past his prime between the ages of thirty-two and thirty-five; and the winter was hard on both of them. Her work sometimes required her to travel for miles, and when the snow fell she was stuck in some motel in Outer Mongolia, New Hampshire, while he was at home in the woods all by himself, living off Campbell's soup and drop biscuits until the snowplows came through. She'd been taking a week off work just to make him feel cared for a little—how

like a child he could be, what a mixture of ups and downs and pouts and perkiness. He was an artisan, a craftsman, and there were so few around anymore, and look how the world treated him.

"I said, it's in the garage."

"Okay. Jesus, Stephen, you'd think I'd just found your secret garden or something." And then, she heard it again.

Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap.

More frantic, the dying rat in the chest scratching its paws against the wood grain.

"Hear that?" she asked.

Stephen listened for a few seconds, and shook his head. "It's the branches outside—scraping the wall above. Got to cut those some day—after the ice melts. After this goddamned winter is over."

★ ★

Linda made dinner at six, but Stephen told her he was going down the road for a beer while the road was still open. She was hurt he didn't ask her along, although she wouldn't've gone to The Wily Trapper, which was the roadhouse out on House Mountain, just six miles outside of town—she didn't like bars, nor did she enjoy his drinking, although she understood his need for a few beers. She understood what he was going through. It was a lot of work on her part, maintaining the marriage while he was so down about everything, but she figured if two years were bad out of a lifetime, what was that? A breath, that was all, just a breath out of an eternity of breathing. The sex had fallen by the wayside, too, but she had never placed much value on sex or sexuality, and she had always felt that he was watching her for signs of putting on weight or getting older whenever she had to take off her clothes in front of him, and she especially hadn't liked the unflattering angles he'd be viewing her from when he mounted her. She knew that he had diminished desire, now, especially in winter, in relative unemployment; her parents' sexuality had been reserved for child-bearing years, and since she and Stephen had decided on no children, what would foregoing that uncomfortable and sometimes humiliating pleasure matter?

Still, she longed for his touch, for that kind of wincing pleasure when he took her, as he had in their first months together, when he took her and held her so tight that she wondered if he might smother her. And then, the wave upon wave of electrical current running between their bodies, as if they would generate their own power—that sparking second when she forgot how unattractive she felt, when the pleasure was more than just a response, when something seemed to be created between them like nothing could ever break it, and then her mind, gone, gone, a blue spark in a

yellow field of emanations, his fingers about her throat, his groans, the tears in his eyes which made him seem so sensitive to her, the way he cried like a baby when he was spent. That last thing had been better than her own pleasure, for she always retained some home-learned guilt about her body, but that last thing, her arms around him, his head in her breasts, the feeling of his tears against her nipples like a mother with her child ... she missed that most of all.

After she ate her split pea soup and ham sandwich, she watched the news. The weatherman mentioned the possibility of snow, so she called down to The Wily Trapper to get a message to Stephen, but the bartender said that he hadn't been in all night.

2.

It didn't surprise her as much as she thought it would, this bit of information. Her father had an affair at least once, and her mother had told her years later. Her mother had said, "I wanted to leave him, but I wasn't sure."

"You didn't just ask him? I would've," Linda said, shocked and saddened at the time.

Her mother shook her head, "No, in marriage things are different than in other things. If I had confronted him, and he had told me he was having an affair, I would've stood by my principles and left him then. If he told me he wasn't having one, I wouldn't have believed him, and I would've acted crazy. I had a bad year, then, wondering, but I'm glad I stayed."

"Why?"

"Because there are rewards, Linda, other rewards for staying in a marriage."

"But you must've lost respect for him. And trust."

"I guess I did, but there are other rewards. You'll understand when you get married. You have to go through some hurt in life, no matter who you're with. But if you stick with it, things will grow."

She hadn't understood then, but now, in her thirties, she did, and she sat and watched the snow fall outside the kitchen window, thinking about the other rewards of staying in a marriage, the ones other than happiness.

The snow piled up in enormous drifts by nine, and the wind shrieked through the windows where the plastic sheeting had come untaped. By ten, when the wind died, and the vacuum silence of snow was interrupted only by the distant sound of trucks out on the interstate, Linda had already gone through the pockets of his jackets and pants, plundered his desk drawers, and the strong box where he kept his records and receipts. She slipped on a pair of boots and his down jacket and braved the cold and two feet of snow to go to his workshop. It had once been a stable, for the previous owner had kept three horses, but over the six years they'd lived there, Stephen had turned it into his

dreamplace. His drill press, circular saw, bench saw, vises and braces, all the drill bits arranged neatly, and a half dozen or more planes, hammers, nails, carving tools. It smelled of fresh-cut wood, as if the tree had been shaved right there, within the hour, and the scent of pine sap almost on her lips, just breathing the vivid air. She went over to his worktable. He had stopped making a small chest of drawers, the kind that would be suitable for jewelry or scarves—the chest was done, but not finished, and the drawers were cut and carved but required some assembly. He did beautiful work, and for all his troubles, she admired the man for his talent.

But inside the chest was a woman's bra, wadded up.

She picked it up, and, without knowing why, sniffed it. It smelled like perfume, the cheap dime-store kind. The kind teenage girls wore. The bra was small. Was he screwing some sixteen-year-old from the local high school? There had been that girl, Willa, who had helped around the house, two summers back when Linda had been on the road a lot with work. But Willa's breasts were enormous for a girl, so much so that she bent forward. This was not Willa's bra.

As she was turning to go, feeling angry, betrayed, *but not surprised*, Linda saw the other thing, hanging from a nail above the door.

It was a girl's purse, small, also cheap, dime-store bought.

She reached up and lifted it off the nail. She hesitated a moment before looking inside it. Was she going too far? Her mother hadn't investigated her father's affair. Her parents seemed to have a wonderful marriage, especially now that they were in their sixties.

But she undid the clasp, and inside were some Kleenex. She moved these around. A set of keys. A pack of Wrigley's. A tampon.

A driver's license.

The girl was only nineteen. At least he wasn't going for underage girls. At least her competition could never provide Stephen with a *life, not like me. I am his life. What would he do without me?* Her name was Mary Anne Lamprette. It was a Vermont driver's license.

Why would a girl leave her purse behind?

There was six dollars all wadded up, and some change, too. Another tampon—this one bloody, with a Kleenex wrapped around it. She closed the purse, and set it back on the nail.

Inside the house again, she looked up the name in the phone book, and found Mary Anne Lamprette living on Copper Road. Linda dialed the number, and after four rings, the machine answered. The girl's voice was sweet and perky. The voice said, "Hey, it's Mary Anne. Nobody's here, or maybe I am only I'm

just fooling around. So keep talking, or you may never hear from me again."

Linda hung the phone up.

★ ★

She couldn't sleep that night, and she wondered about that chest in the basement. The dropcloth around it, how it had been so neatly tucked. The house was freezing at this point, so she went to turn the heat up to eighty, and kept the down jacket on. She imagined that Stephen was pressing himself into the doughy form of his beloved Mary Anne, leaving the impression in her skin of his grubby fingers, his paunchy belly, his dick expanding the poor girl's inner geometry until her innards would prolapse into a dodecahedron. What would that feel like? It had been so long since they'd made love, since she was feeling like a pretty young girl. Would he put his hand about her throat like a necklace, tightening while the shimmering blue pleasure spread across her thighs, across her belly, through her hardened, small nipples? *Don't think about sex. It doesn't matter. He loves you, and Mary Anne is just a diversion, a release from his anxiety.*

Then, as she lay thinking about the chest, and sex, she heard what sounded like a cat in heat screeching for a brief second.

Then, the silent world of a snow-covered house.

★ ★

She got the trap door up again, and slid down to the cold floor of the basement. The tapping began again, as if whatever was inside the chest had heard her coming. Then a sound like sexual awakening, a gasp, or a moan of pain. She turned on the bulb, and, shivering, stepped around the boxes and overturned tables until she got to the chest. She pulled the dropcloth back. The chest was locked. Linda had no idea where the key might be. She rapped on the top of the chest.

Something tapped back, the same sequence of raps.

"Hello?" Linda asked, something dawning on her, something terrible, although her mind was becoming clouded with the confusion of conflicting emotions.

"Aaauragh," the voice within the box said. The tapping became more rapid.

"My God," Linda stood there, shaking, and she dropped the flashlight—its crash to the concrete floor echoed through the house.

And then, she asked the box, "Mary Anne?"

The thing in the box answered with a series of desperate, splintery scratches.

3.

Stephen was in by noon the next day. "Tried to call," he lied, "but the phones were down. Stayed overnight at Joe Ball's. Slept in his daughter's bed. She's away at U. Mass. Majoring in journalism or something. Hard to believe she's eighteen already. Paula sends her best."

Linda was reading one of his Louis L'Amour's, trying to block his lies out. She chewed her lip as he spoke; he went on and on about the Ball family, how Paula was getting a little down because of the harsh winter, how Joe couldn't get his plow to start, how Billy, the youngest, was flunking chemistry. Finally, Linda looked up from her book. "I know about her," she said.

Stephen didn't even change his expression, although he looked a bit like a deer caught in headlights just before the impact. "Who? What do you mean?"

"That's all I'm going to say. I spoke to her last night while you were gone."

He blinked, turned his head to the side as if he could read something on the wall near the family pictures. Then he turned completely around, looking out the living room window. "Things in your head again, Linda, you've got to get out more. This week off from work was the wrong thing. We've been under so much stress." He was so much like a little boy caught doing something naughty, scrambling with stories to get out of it.

"I couldn't find the key, but I talked to her anyway."

And then Stephen held his breath, then exhaled after a long minute. He knew he was caught, he had that erratic breathing of a captured liar.

He said, "Which one did you talk to?"

Linda asked, "How many have there been?"

4.

He kept the keys to the chests and cabinets with him at all times. "You don't really want to see her, do you?" But then he saw the look on Linda's face—she would brook no nonsense. "She's not pretty. Not like you. But she ..."

"She what?"

He shuddered, again reminding her of a little boy having to reveal his most humiliating secret. He said, "She lies real still." He turned to face her, tears in his eyes.

Linda took this in; the scope of it; what it meant. What it meant that Stephen *liked*. She felt a wave of nausea, to have *lived* with this man, to have *shared* ... so much time, so much energy, so much damn *work*. She remembered, with a certain amount of horror, how, when they made love he had wanted her quiet and still, his hands about her throat when he came inside her,

her eyes closed, her breathing stilled, briefly. Four young women around the property, all in boxes and crates and chests and wardrobes, and perhaps another—he couldn't quite remember—down at the old store where he had run his business before hard times hit.

But the worst for her, still, was the word that she couldn't contain. "Unfaithful," she spat out. "How dare you lie to me, live the way we lived, deny me a loving, sexual relationship, while you were out finding these ... tramps! How dare you, after all I've done for you, after all the sacrifices, Christ! Jesus, Stephen, you have some kind of sickness. You need help."

He cast his glance down to his muddy shoes; his hands slid into the pockets of his jeans; he was so rumpled looking, his flannel shirt bunching around his waist, his hair a mess, his sorrow amplified by the snow that still melted from his clothes. He said something almost silently.

"What?" she asked.

He looked into her eyes. "It's not so bad. I said. It's not so bad. When they're dead. Completely dead, I mean. They give me pleasure."

Linda followed him into the basement, flicked on the light, watched as he clicked the key into the lock on the chest, and turned it.

"You sure?" he asked.

She nodded.

He lifted the lid up; its hinges creaked against the wood.

The girl was curled in a fetal position, as if she'd fallen asleep. She was naked except for the pink silk panties, but her arms covered her breasts demurely. The smell of cedar chips and rotten meat came up to Linda's nostrils, and she began breathing through her mouth to avoid the smell. Mary Anne Lamprette was a pretty girl, but she looked older than nineteen. What sort of life would she have anyway? Having affairs with married men, working in some tavern or in a dress shop waiting on the depressed and downtrodden in town. What sort of life would that have been? Linda would not have wanted that life at all. Linda said, "She was alive last night."

Stephen said, "Sometimes it takes a week. I leave them in the chips to help with the smell."

Linda said, "And that's how you like to make love?"

Stephen said nothing.

"And you didn't touch these girls—this girl—before she died?"

"I wouldn't," he said, "I just couldn't."

Linda looked from the dead girl to her husband, to the beautiful furniture, some covered, some not. "Stephen. Stephen?"

"Yes?"

"What is it that you like so much—about this. This



hang up, or whatever you'd call it?"

"You really want to know?"

She nodded.

He said, "It's going to sound silly."

"Try me."

"Okay. They get cold on the outside. Their skin. Their hair, even. But on the inside. On the *inside*. It's like a warm wet velvet glove." He said this as if it was the most important feeling in the entire world, and a shred of sanity came back to her while she listened to him, *really* listened, and the nausea in her stomach, in her *soul*, came up her throat.

She barely noticed his arm coming up and then down, the metal of the flashlight gleaming in the feeble basement light.

5.

She awoke to darkness. Smell of cedar chips. She touched the sides of the chest to check its dimensions. Too small to move about much.

"Stephen?"

No answer.

She pushed on the lid, but it was locked, and perhaps even weighted down, too.

She heard his voice, on the other side of the wood.

"Linda, Linda."

"Please, Stephen, I'm frightened."

"Oh, Linda, you know you're the only woman I really love."

"I know that, sweetheart. Now let me out. LET ME OUT."

"I can't. I saw that look on your face."

"I was jealous. Your affairs. The pretty girls."

"They meant nothing to me. Just sensation, that was all."

"Stephen? What's going to happen?"

"You'll get hungry, then thirsty. Then you'll fall asleep. You'll scratch some. Maybe it'll hurt. I'm not sure. I try to stay away from the boxes for at least four days. I usually hit the girls harder though. Maybe it'll take longer with you. I don't know."

Linda listened to him, cried, prayed, thought of

her mother, and within the hour began hallucinating, until even the hallucinations seemed to shrink and dry up and she knew death was coming to her. She had no concept of days, how many had passed, or how many times Stephen had come to talk to her.

He said, "It's always been my dream to have you. Like this. Always."

Do the dead feel? When they are taken by the passion of the living, do they buck and grind and moan and delight, if only in the stillness of their flesh and bones?

His dream, she thought, fading along a wavelength of sputtering darkness, *I am his dream*. She felt the moment come upon her, the wave of pleasure, the overlapping sensations of pain and opening, of the river of ultimate love and touch, the stormy gusts of the opening doors and windows of eternity, of the stillness of creation.

She smelled the ozone of fading consciousness, and then bore witness to the blue heralded spark of the machinery of flesh, dying, set in new motion.

6.

Stephen drew her from the chest, and knew true and faithful love for the first time in his life.

The snow beyond the house piled in hills and across the span of forests, and cutting through the ice wooden silence, was the fierce cry of human joy.

Do the dead feel? When the body is no longer occupied with shared consciousness, do the nerve endings long to twitch and spur the body onward? When his fingers found her, stroking gently and then with roughness, did she lay there, somewhere in that body that could have no expression, and remember what the girl, Mary Anne, had told her?

"Please," the dying girl had said through the wood, "please."

Had that been her last wish?

It is the commandment of physical love, that one word, and some who dwell in the flesh will follow its law even unto the darkest of places.

— CD

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THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS ITALIAN ASSOCIATION

Da Soul Train Don't Run On-Time No Mo' . . .

Before we get started on today's topic for discussion, I guess I should clean up a few loose ends and make a few clarifications.

The first thing is the mail. Those of you who, after being enlightened and inspired by my words beyond your dizziest expectations, feel you must write me or send me gifts, the address is:

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I will read everything you write; I will answer none of it, unless I indirectly address it or include your note in the usual preamble to my column. In general, I want all of you to stop asking about the identities of the "artists" with whom Elizabeth and I dined at Il Purgatorio's. Thumb screws couldn't get it out of me, although, I gotta give a lot of you a lot of credit for some creative (albeit wrong) guesses.

And stop asking Chizmar, 'cause I didn't tell him either.

The next thing is the note I get from the occasional reader who asks if I've ever written anything

other than this column. Now maybe, I'm getting a lot cooler as I slide into my declining years, but odd as it may seem, this kind of question no longer pisses me off and inspires me to term the questioner a mook or a troglodyte. It does makes me wonder what planet the guy is on when he's reading his issues of *CD*—because a lot of my columns deal with my writing and publishing experiences, and only the most blunt-ended minds out there would not, perhaps, suspect that maybe I've written something other than what you now read.

Which is kind of a warm-up to what can only be called a shameless attempt to extract money from all of you.

Let me explain: when the publisher of my last novel, *The Blood of the Lamb*, called me about 6 months ago informing me the hardcover edition was being remaindered (publishing's term for dumping all remaining copies to whomever is dumb enough to buy crates of them at a bulk rate, super-discount—and the reason you see all kinds of books you've never heard

of at the bargain bins of your local supermarket and second-hand clothing stores), and asking if I wanted to buy any of them? I said "yeah, I'll take ALL of them."

This kind of shocked them, but I did it for two very good reasons: (1) I didn't want to walk into Frank's Garden Center or the local K-Mart and see my book being hustled for \$4.98. and (2) if I knew how many copies they had left, and if I knew how many they printed (I did), then I would know how many they sold—which meant they couldn't fuck me when it came time to hand out my royalty statements.

There is actually a third good reason: I have plenty of copies of a book of which I am very proud. I take them to personal appearances, conventions, signings, etc. and sell them to people who want it and appreciate it. I can also give them away as gifts, promotional items, and other things that make you look like a nice guy.

So please, if you would like a handsome hardcover of my last novel, which won the 1993 Bram Stoker Award (in case you didn't

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Okay, thanks for the chance to get in some crass commercialism. We all gotta pay the bills, friends. You do it by getting up every morning and dragging your carcass off to a job; I do it like this. I don't know—seems like a nice arrangement to me.

And now, let's get on with today's material. Our story begins many years ago when I was a member of the Space Faring Whores of Arcturus (SFWA, Inc. aka SFFWA, Inc.). I was at a convention somewhere and Damon Knight was on a panel or holding court in a hotel corridor outside a party room whose air had been rendered rank and fetid by an aggregate of un-

washed, pore-clogged, sweat-sheened endomorphs. Damon was recounting his recent epiphany at Milford Writers Conference/Workshop (an annual to semi-annual, invitation-only gathering during the late 60s and early 70s of many of the most talented SF writers of the day).

The way I recall it, Damon said he was sitting there in a circle with maybe 15 or 20 talented people and he looked around and said something like: "Hey, how come we're all white?"

Now it could be argued that the correct response to this question should be "Who gives a shit?!"

And you know what, I think I will argue that position . . . (isn't that a surprise?) But back then, you see, when this was just before, during, or soon after the hallowed "Summer of Love" when everybody was prancing each other with the fervor of minks or rabbits, all the Milford-ites looked at one another in what must have been revelatory shock. What followed is

unclear in remembered detail but the essence of it is this: everyone started to feel guilty(!) that none (or practically none) of the SF writing, editing, agenting, and publishing community were black (or as they were called back then "Afro-American," and then later "black"—or maybe it was the other way around?—or perhaps you prefer the au courant "African Americans" . . . ?). Damon went on to tell whomever would listen that everyone agreed that something had to be done about this, and I wonder now what he thought that something might be: roving bands of sf fans pouncing upon unsuspecting blacks, bludgeoning them with rolled up back-issues of *Galaxy* and *Analog*, and forcing them to sit behind typewriters until they started producing reasonable facsimiles of Heinlein by way of the Gold Coast, the Congo, and Murchison Falls?

Something had to be done about this. Implying that there was something inherently wrong with SF writers being primarily white.

Greetings from

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Implying that there was someone or some institution to be blamed for this inequity. That this lot of bearded, socks-in-your-sandals, post-Futurians should be ashamed for not having any of their black brothers joining in the circle of caustic, back-biting, hidden-politicked career assassination and reputation-sculpture posing as criticism.

I remember thinking back then how odd Damon's story was, and even why it might be true, but beyond that, I didn't really think much of it. And then a funny thing happened. I wasn't there, but Ted White told me about it. Listen: 25 years ago, or perhaps even 30 (I'm not sure), there was a writer of science fiction/fantasy putting out a novel every year or two for one of the big paperback factories where SF was a colorful staple of their list of titles each month. The writer's books sold very average numbers and he had made little or no impact with either the hardcore fans or the community of science fiction and fantasy critics—the self-styled kingmakers who decided who the hot new writers were each year. In fact, his books were becoming increasingly less readable with each new title. Anyway, he joined SFWA and one year he shows up at a Nebula Awards banquet in New York, and suddenly everything changed.

The writer's name was Samuel R. Delaney . . . and he was black.

Like I said, I wasn't there, but Ted White said everyone practically fell all over themselves trying to be nice to this guy and accommodating him. To hear Ted tell it, it sounded a little embarrassing. Naturally it didn't take long before Delaney was being hailed as the greatest light in the SF firmament. He was nominated for and won many Nebula and Hugo Awards and it became an Emperor has no clothes shtick: writers in private confiding to one another that De-

laney's stories and novels were either (a) incomprehensible, (b) self-indulgent, (c) stultifyingly dull, or that good (d) all of the above.

But everybody was afraid to say it publicly in print or on a panel or something—that Delaney was not so hot after all, and that maybe we got a little carried away with all the awards because now he's starting to believe his own press clippings and if you think his old stuff bad, wait till you try to read some of the new stuff because it's so convoluted and full of self-conscious, pretentiousness that even the critics are afraid to say anything about it because they don't have a fucking clue what Delaney's books are about anymore and what the hell do we do with this guy?

They were afraid to say anything because he was black and everyone was terrified of being branded a racist because they didn't like his writing. What a fucking joke. It is so sad because it was unfair to all the fans who were bludgeoned into accepting Delaney as one of SF's New Wave stars when it was clear to anyone reading the stuff that he did not belong in the same sentence with names such as Zelazny, Ellison, Sheekley, Ballard, Lafferty, Silverberg, LeGuin, Malzberg, Russ, and Moorcock. In fact, Delaney couldn't have carried any of one of their lunchboxes . . .

Okay, but wait—as usual with me, there's more!

And besides, this column is not a mindless attack on Delaney. He's a nice guy, old Chip, it's just that I don't think he was anywhere near as talented as we were all told, and that the only reason he was elevated to SF sainthood is because he had that fashionable deep tan, my main man.

I even noticed this sort of racial idiocy on a much smaller scale with my own career. In 1974, when I was very much immersed in SF (yes, I admit it: I was once a sky-fie writer . . .), I was nominated for

something called the John W. Campbell Award. It was a nice little plaque-thing the World Con Hugo Committee gave out every year to the "most promising new science fiction writer" or some such foorarah. They probably still do, I don't know. The requirements for nomination: only those who had been published professionally for the first time within the last two years.

Anyway, cutting to the chase, I was on the final ballot with the following people: Spider Robinson, Lisa Tuttle, Guy Snyder, and Jesse Miller. An interesting mix, actually. Two of them went on to have successful careers as writers and the other two, as far as I know, tumbled into the black hole of literary obscurity, never to escape its lethal gravity. But the most interesting aspect of this anecdote is the inclusion of Jesse Miller on the ballot. He was a writer who had, at the time of the 1974 award, had published one story in *Analog* in 1972, and as I recall, it was about a guy raising pigeons on a ghetto rooftop, and not really much of a science fiction story, and certainly not an *Analog* story.

One story published. Not even really science fiction, so what was its author doing on the Campbell Award ballot?

C'mon, do I really have to spell it out? Do you think for a minute that Jesse Miller could be a pseudonym for a Latvian pawnbroker living in Dubuque? Or perhaps a Scottish philatelist who handwrote his stories each afternoon in his cottage on the moors? Or maybe—

Nah, you know what he was, don't you?

And he was on the ballot because he was the only one the fans could find.

Now I don't know about you, but I find this to be more than just sad, I think it's an outrage. It reminds me of a long-ago time when I was working on my PhD at the

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University of Maryland (I quit about halfway through the program, so don't worry about having to call me Doctor . . .). I'd just finished my master's degree and they'd hustled me into the graduate assistant program, which meant I had to teach all the shit courses that none of the professors wanted to deal with. One of them was "Remedial English"—a summer course required for incoming freshman, who had not done very well on the verbal section of the SATs and were going to need to vastly improve their writing skills. If they didn't pass this class, the idea was that they could not attend college—the further extension of this idea being that they would lack the abilities needed to write the reams of fucking papers and essay exams that they used to make you do in college.

So, I walk into the classroom, and I am not really surprised to find it is comprised completely of black kids from city schools where they had been pushed through and given diplomas even though they didn't know dick. Most of them, besides displaying pretty impressive levels of ignorance, are also very high on the arrogance scale. Bad combination, that. I struggle through ten weeks of young black males slumping in and out of their desks either sleeping or wise-cracking or hitting on the chicks. Out of maybe 30 students, I think I maybe had five people who were either driven, motivated, or even mildly interested in learning anything in the class. The rest of them, fueled by the fractured grammar and syntax of slum English ("Where John? He not here . . . He be bad!"), clearly couldn't give a shit.

So I failed them. 24 out of 31 crash and burn with me. And many of those hadn't even come close. I can remember lots of exams scoring in the 20s and low 30s. Not only were they dumb as flat stones, they seemed to be proud of it—as though it were not manly to be

smart. (More than one of my students expressed the idea to me that only "homeo-seshuls" like to read a lot of books") So, end of August comes and I turned in my grade reports to my professor and he glanced over them and then turns paler than he already is.

"You— you can't do this . . . you can't do this . . . you . . ." is all he can say. He was clearly stunned into semi-aphasia.

"Can't do what? Fail them?"

"You failed more than half the class!" he said.

"I had a good reason. They didn't learn anything. They didn't care."

"But you don't understand," he said with utmost gravity. "You CAN'T fail these kids."

I did understand at that point, far too well, but I wanted him to actually say it, so I said: "And why exactly is that?"

"Because they're black," he said. "We have to pass them. You'll have to re-do this grade report."

You know, I didn't even bother trying to argue with him about how wrong this was and what an ultimate disservice we were doing to these kids and to the society that would receive them into its workforce someday. As long as they continued to be ushered on through every opportunity as though it were a fucking right, in the name of justice and equality, then they were getting an even worse butt-fucking than the old cracker brand of racism.

So I just said: "No, I'm not changing it. And I won't sign a bogus one. So you guys do what you want, but I can't compromise what I think is right."

I left it like that. I didn't care what they did to me. They could kick me out of the graduate school if they wanted; I was already selling tons of stories and had three of four novels published by then, so it really didn't matter to me. What they did was what I expected: they did nothing. They passed the en-

tire class with some kind of administrative magic and they didn't fuck with me. I have to give them credit for fairhandedness—they were chickenshit concerning all aspects of the deal.

Years later, I got talked into joining the Maryland chapter of something calling itself the National Writers Union—an organization that wanted to get the same rights for book and magazine writers that the WGA had established for screenwriters. Or so they said. The longer I remained a member, I detected a strong political slant to everything they attempted to do, and their newsletter was shot through with more leftist, ultra-liberal, socialist horseshit than your typical National Public Radio newscast. The longer this NWU continued its "struggle" against the capitalist oppressors of the publishing world, the sillier they looked, until finally, when I attended a Maryland meeting where the featured speaker was a woman from the New York City chapter who would instruct us on the upcoming year's agenda and priorities—the most important of which, she said proudly, would be the effort "to advance the rights and opportunities of writers of color."

Yeah, let's examine that phrase a little more closely. The "rights"? What fucking rights are these? Are we to assume that "writers of color" (I just love that phrase, don't you?) have different or perhaps more rights than writers of—I fumble for the correct phrase here, but let's try writers of non-color? And just what might these "rights" be?

I shudder to think about what they might have had in mind within their pointy little heads.

And what about these "opportunities"? What the hell does that mean? Are we supposed to somehow intimidate, embarrass or in some other way bludgeon publishers into creating more outlets for "colored writing"? Whatever hap-

pened to supply and demand?

And what the fuck are "writers of color"?

Anyway, to make this as brief as possible, suffice it to say that I stood up and told this frizzy-haired, frustrated housewife who was trying to make a name for herself by writing effusively feminist diatribes about Dance in the Village Voice, that the only colors any writers should be concerned with were their BLACK letters on a WHITE page, and that if the NWU continued to suck up to silly political agendas, they would do it without me and I suspected thousands of other writers who were more concerned about issues affecting ALL of us like minimum per word rates, standardized industry contracts, group health plans, and an end to the strip/return policy. Everything else was bullshit, I told

her, including you and your New York Liberal Head-Up-Your-Ass brand of bullshit. Good-bye NWU. I'm outta here. I'm calling a cab. A union like this, I don't want any part of.

But I'll bet you all figured that anyway.

Now, it's getting late and this piece is running over length and over budget (even at \$500 an issue, Chizmar's getting his money's worth on this one . . .), I need to say a few things quickly.

The main topic this month requires more space than a single column, so this will be continued next issue and for as many more as it will take. I invite commentary on what I have thus far said, but I will not tolerate any myopic idiots who read this and conclude that I am espousing some numbhead racist

philosophy, because that is quite the contrary. The point so far being established is that there is far too much being made about race and that especially in publishing, there is no place for it. Now, if everybody required that you attached a photograph of yourself with every manuscript you submitted, well, then maybe some publishers out there might have a secret agenda, but that ain't the case, friends.

When we read something, we don't care what color the writer is. At least we shouldn't.

But racism is a pertinent issue and so we will continue to examine its implications on publishing, business at-large, and for our society in the next issue.

Keep the cards and letters coming.

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In those murky days after Reggie's suicide, my mother buzzed through my life like a noisy, nasty fly. When the sedation haze lifted, I found all trace of him erased from the apartment. She'd sent his clothes to the Goodwill, shipped his tools to his brother, packed away our photo album and love letters and put them in the storage attic.

Just as I was about to swat her, she left.

She meant well, but I would liked to have packed Reggie away myself. The deed done, however, I wasn't about to unpack him—I was too fragile.

I was left with a cold and lonely apartment, populated by grief and guilt, tears and heartache.

Ten nights after he died, I turned over in dream-entangled sheets and felt his warm smooth skin. His breath was sweet, like strawberries, and at my touch, he turned me over, snuggled my back and covered my breast with his large, warm hand. I slept easier and less afraid of the night.

I forgot about that dream until about noon the next day when I took my sandwich and apple to the courtyard to watch secretaries in their summer frocks preen and flirt with young executives. I ate my apple first, then reached for the sun-warmed brown bag. At first touch, I remembered the night, and the thrill of his skin on my fingertips. My nipples hardened at the memory and pressed against my clothes as aching soaked my belly and the familiar grief lay heavy in my chest.

Imagination can be cruel, I said, and dropped the apple core on top of the poor sandwich, refolded the bag and threw it away.

Work was no consolation. I couldn't concentrate. I heard his voice in the hall. I saw the back of his head as the elevator door closed. I smelled his aftershave in the lobby.

I feigned a headache and went home early, drew a scented bath, lit a candle and soaked until the water chilled. I remembered when he used to join me in the tub.

I turned on classical music and remembered our

mutual love for the symphony. I cooked a chicken breast and remembered the orange sauce he created one inspirational snowy day. I wrapped up in the terry robe he bought me for Christmas, crawled between yellow sheets we bought one carefree spring day, and cried myself to sleep.

At two a.m., he was there, snoring softly, his long legs, weighted by huge feet, moving restlessly, like a dreaming puppy.

I reached out, tentatively, fear overcome by longing. Yearning.

Tears came again, but I choked back the sob and pressed my breasts to his back, my tummy to his butt, my thighs to his hamstrings. I wrapped one arm around his torso and let the other slide under his pillow.

I breathed in the campfire scent of him, kissed his neck. He stilled his restless legs, twined his fingers with mine and we both slept.

In the morning, I was alone. I grabbed the pillow with the desperation of a woman afraid for her sanity. It still had the imprint of his head. It still smelled like him. He *had* been here. He *had*.

He came to our bed every night after that. Every night, I tasted his saltiness, smelled his uniqueness, touched him and let his arms enfold me with comfort and tenderness.

But I never heard his voice. I never saw his face. I never looked into his eyes, and I couldn't stand that. One night I forced the issue.

I awoke on a sultry summer night and he was with me, one arm thrown over his face, one hand resting on my thigh. The thick air pressed close.

I felt that hand on my leg and remembered how well that hand knew my reactions, understood my responses. I moved slightly under the fingers; felt them flex.

Reggie made a small noise.

Wide awake now, and aroused by memory, I covered his hand with my own and moved it up my thigh, higher until the black curly hairs on his fingers were indistinguishable from my own.

He turned away, tried to draw his hand back, but I was awash with my idea and not about to let him leave me now. Too long I had been without him. Too long I had been without.

I moved his hand deeper and more forcefully, feeling my heart flutter as his fingers automatically

began to probe in the skillful way that was his second nature.

I moaned in pleasure and he tensed, then withdrew his hand.

"Reggie," I said, my heart breaking again, "please."

And he was gone, the light sheet that had covered us slowly sinking, like my passion, to the bed.

I cried until I had no strength. Then I got up, washed my face and made a pot of coffee.

Then I got mad.

I had a right to get over him.

He had no right to string my emotions into a never-ending thread. He needed to stay dead and keep his soft, hairy fingers out of my bed and off of my skin.

I said it. I felt it. I believed it, but it was killing me all the same. I missed him so badly.

When he came back the next night, I hugged him.

The following night, I kicked him and told him to leave. I got up and began to think.

Why was he there? What did he want? Was it something about his suicide? Could I help him on his way? I hurt for him, hated his unrest, vowed to help my man find peace.

The following night I slept fitfully and came wide awake the instant the space next to me began to fill. The covers raised as if pumped full of air. Then he had heat, and texture, then color.

"Reggie," I said, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder. Why did he always face away from me?

He moved. He was not asleep.

"Reggie, look at me. I need to see you, your face, your eyes. Reggie, honey, why are you here? What do you want? Tell me. Show me. Let me help you."

His hand shot out and gripped mine, then he began to fade.

"No," I cried. "Please. Stay."

His hand tightened as if he didn't want to go, but we were both powerless to stop it. I grabbed his shoulder to turn him toward me, but it was too late. My fingers slipped right through him.

Why wouldn't he face me? Had death turned him ugly? Did his face show something in death that it had not shown in life? Was he ashamed? Had he come to make peace with me for something—his suicide, perhaps?—and literally could not face me until I had forgiven him?

To my female intuition, this felt solid, felt right. Of all the wild things I could imagine Reggie doing, suicide was never among them. I never understood. I thought I would never understand. Except now, perhaps, when he needed me to understand. I had to discover the source of his shame, confront him, forgive him and let him go to his reward or his hell—whatever his release was to be.

The next day I opened a bottle of red wine—it goes well with grief—and got the box down from the attic. Our box of history. It was the only thing I had left of Reggie, and if there was a clue, it had to be there. I said a silent prayer and peeled back the wide cellophane tape.

A brown paper lunch sack was right on top. It was filled with the letters he wrote when his Army reserve unit had been called to Panama. For six dark, lonely months, our daily letters crossed in the mail, time lag giving answers to long forgotten questions. I didn't need to look at the letters; they had become part of me. Some day, maybe, when I had forgotten what his handwriting looked like.

Under the bag of letters was our photograph album. I'd pasted in, dated and annotated each fond entry. I didn't need to look at the photograph album again. Some day, maybe, when I had forgotten what he looked like.

I set the album aside and all that was left in the box was an envelope with my name on it. I'd never seen this envelope before.

A tear caught in my chest as I looked at the three things in the box. Mom packed away this envelope. She packed away this envelope and used the letters and photo album as an excuse. Why?

I picked the envelope up by a corner. It had power over me. It had the power to hurt me, I knew it. Maybe it also had the power to heal me. To heal Reggie.

I set it on the coffee table and went to the kitchen for a cup of tea to settle myself. But my mind would not settle. I returned to the living room, choosing to gulp down the glass of wine instead.

There it sat, that cursed envelope, innocent in and of itself, while I viewed it as the instrument that might tear my world apart.

No, that had been a shotgun. This was just an envelope.

I picked it up and ripped it open. A single sheet. I unfolded it.

"Jean.

I am lost. Please forgive the spiritual disease that has sucked the life from me. Forgive yourself and don't waste grief on my sorry soul.

Love, Reg."

His suicide note. So there *had* been one.

I would forgive Reggie, no matter his crime. I would forgive myself, for emotions are human.

But I would *never* forgive my mother for keeping this from me.

My face burned with indignation as I reread the note, trying to understand. Spiritual disease? What did that mean? Drugs? No. Gambling? Not to my



knowledge. Infidelity. Perhaps.

It was well into the night that my mind stopped spinning. At three o'clock, I dialed my mother's house. Her sleepy voice answered the phone. "Hello?"

"It's me," I said.

"Jean?" I heard her sit up, clearing her throat, looking at the clock. "My God, honey, the time. What is it? Are you okay?"

"Not really. I found Reggie's suicide note."

"Oh." There was more to that flat response than an innocent protecting of one's offspring. "Did you read it?"

"Of course. Did you?" I knew she hadn't, the envelope was unmolested.

"No."

"Why did you hide it?"

"How did you find it?"

"Oh, Mother, didn't you know you couldn't hide something like that for long?"

"What did it say?"

I felt no need to tell her.

"I wanted you to heal."

"You were afraid?"

"Yes. For you. For me. For us."

"Why?" It came wailing out of me.

"Jean—how can I answer that? I don't know. Things happen. They just happen."

I waited.

"I can't expect you to understand. I'm not sure I understand myself why I—why we—why people do the

things we did—they do."

I was no longer sure we were both talking about the same thing. I held on to my silence.

"I never meant to hurt you."

I began to shake. I didn't want to understand. I didn't want to hear more.

"It had nothing to do with you, darling—I had no idea Reggie would—what we did was wrong, but—"

I slammed the phone down. I tore my hair. I screamed, kicked, cried, pounded my belly, trying to stop the hurt, the pain, the awful, awful, awful.

Sometime, I guess, I fell on the bed.

Reggie woke me. I sobbed into his back, tears of pain, tears of sorrow, tears of remorse. Finally, tears of forgiveness.

Then he turned and held me tightly, his strong hands stroking my back. I clung to him as to life—my history tossed and rewritten in a gush of maternal betrayal and confession.

He pulled away and looked deeply into me, his eyes clear and bright, his soul more apparent than ever before.

"I love you," I said.

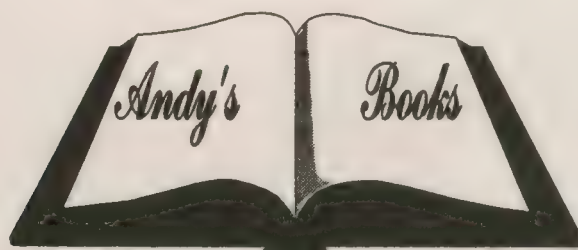
He closed his eyes in relief and hugged me close. "Even so?" he whispered through my hair, his voice ethereal and echoing.

I nodded, my emotion too terrible to trust.

He sighed and the sigh blew straight through me.

I caught my breath, held the scent of his essence, and when I again breathed, he was gone.

— CD



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A CONVERSATION WITH NANCY A. COLLINS

CONDUCTED BY JAMES MOORE

Nancy A. Collins can hardly be called a rising star of the horror genre, as her star has already risen. However, as is often the case, this star is still climbing and her following is still growing in leaps and bounds. Nancy's first novel, *Sunglasses After Dark*, won the HWA's Bram Stoker Award for best first novel as well as the British Fantasy Award in 1990. Since then she has written four additional novels and two dozen or so issues of *Swamp Thing* for DC Comics, in addition to numerous short stories. Nancy recently took the time to answer a few questions about what's next in her career and even about what has gone before. Here's what she had to say:

CD: What inspired you to start writing in the horror field?

Collins: I started off trying to be a science fiction writer, and I'm just not good enough at science to do that. I don't have a problem researching, I'm very good at research, but when it comes to science, except for the most basic biological stuff, it just goes over my head. Horror is so contemporary. You can have it set in any time frame, but it's mostly in the here and now. So, horror's just easier.

CD: How do you feel about the categorization of genres?

Collins: Other people tend to categorize everything, and when they do it's like they've set it in concrete. Science fiction is this thing, and fantasy is that thing, and it can't be anything else. The only way around that is to add more levels, so that you can say "okay, this is hard science fiction, and this is soft science fiction; this is dark fantasy or this is cyberpunk fantasy. It gets really silly after a while, with too many pigeon holes.

CD: You did *Sunglasses After Dark*, and then *Tempter*. After that it seems you stuck mostly with short stories and comic books. Are there more novels coming out?



Collins: There is a sequel to *Sunglasses After Dark*, called *In The Blood*, that came out in '92. It was really mishandled by my publisher. A lot of people who are big fans of my stuff don't even realize it ever came out. I have a fourth novel that came out in Britain, called *Wild Blood*. It's a werewolf novel. It's coming out in America in September from Roc. It came out in Britain last December and it came out in Germany in March, I think.

CD: How well are you doing in the European markets?

Collins: I do very well in Germany, and I sell books in Britain, but it's hard to sell to the British market if you're coming out in paperback. They tend to buy the American versions. I don't know how well I'm doing in France, but they keep buying my books. Apparently there are also Belgian editions and Portuguese editions, and Finnish editions of my books, but I haven't seen them so I honestly don't know. I've just finished my fifth novel, which is also a werewolf story, for Mark Ziesing, it's called *Walking Wolf* and it's sort of what if "Little Big Man" had been a werewolf. The subtitle is "a weird western." It's been fun to write, but it took forever to write. I kept running across more materials to research and I now know more about the Plains Indians than I ever

thought there was to know. I did a lot of research. I didn't put a fraction of the research into the book, but I'm one of those people who feels weird if I don't really know a lot about a subject, even if I don't use it. I'm always afraid someone will catch me making a mistake if I don't do the research. My failed first novel was written back around 1984, and it was so bad that even Zebra wouldn't touch it. It's the same basic concept as *Walking Wolf*, but it was called *Animal Instinct* I still thought the basic idea was valid, but it's taken me ten years to get around to re-writing it.

CD: What is your favorite work of your own to date?

Collins: It's hard to say really, because I like them all and I hate them all at the same time. I guess it was probably *Sunglasses*, because I had never taken on such a mammoth undertaking. I had never done anything larger than a twelve page short story before then. On one level I can see that it was a major step forward for me, but at the same time it showed me how little I knew about writing a book.

CD: What inspired the swing over to comic books?

Collins: I've always been a comic fan, since I was about three or four, and I'd even tried to break into comics a few years earlier, during the black and white comics boom, but I didn't have any success. Then the job just sort of landed in my lap. I wasn't even looking for it anymore, but when they offered I said yes, because I needed the



Photo credit: Beth Gwinn

money. Turned out I had a knack for it, so I ran with it.

CD: You have a new project coming up for DC Comics, when will that be coming out?

Collins: Yeah, *Wick*. That won't be coming out from DC after all, they cancelled it and I really don't know why. No one else seems to know why either. Verotik Comics, Glen Danzig's new comic company is going to release it instead. They're also going to be doing an adaptation of *Sunglasses*. Those should be out sometime in '95.

CD: Rumor has it you've started moving into the editorial field, what can you tell me about that?

Collins: Well, I'm not really doing that much editing. I was basically brought on as a celebrity headhunter, someone to find celebrities and agents to work in the books. I get a say so in the final decisions, but Ed Kramer is doing a lot of the actual editing on both. One is for Avon Books, called *Forbidden Acts*, which is a horror\thriller anthology, and the other one is called *Bloodlust*. For lack of a better term, we're calling it the "Falling Down" anthology—about everyday working Joes who just

snap. It's actually a spin-off of a Stephen King story we got for *Forbidden Acts*; the story was different enough that we decided it should maybe go into a different anthology. Well, we wanted to base the new antho off of the ideas in the King story, but that only left us with about three different ways we could go; we could have a "Getting Divorced" antho, or a "Quitting

Smoking" anthology or we could center it around people going berserk. That or maybe people going to eat in a restaurant. We decided that people going berserk was the most commercial. So far those are the two I'm working on and they may be the only ones ever, 'cause I really don't have the time. I'm enjoying it, and it's something that I wanted to do, but it's really not cost effective and I don't see myself becoming the Marty Greenberg of the 90's. Apparently Marty's not even Marty Greenberg anymore, he was just bought out by Big Entertainment and is now his own employee.

CD: Can you tell us who's going to be in the anthologies?

Collins: Well, clumping them together, I can name a few people. Stephen King, Douglas Clegg, Karl Edward Wagner, Kathe Koja, Lucy Taylor, Stuart Kaminsky, George Chesbro, Richard Laymon, John Shirley, Doug Winter, Melanie Tem, and a performance artist named Genesis P-Orridge.

CD: So what's next for you?

Collins: Well, I'm in the process of finishing *Paint It Black*, which is the third Sonya Blue novel. That's



Photo credit: Ron English ©1993

going to be published by White Wolf and is due out in Spring of '95. It'll be coming out from my British publisher in November or December of this year. I got the rights back to the first two Sonya Blue novels from Viking/Penguin, thanks to more or less being in control of a Stephen King story. *Bloodlust* is being published by Viking/Penguin, and in order to get the anthology they had to relinquish the rights to my Sonya Blue books. I've got a short story collection, *Nameless Sins*, coming out from Gauntlet Press. I've got a *Justice League Quarterly* story coming out from DC by the end of this year I think, which is a full 70 pages. The entire story is about a character called Bloodwind, a black, occult figure who never really had a background, so I got to give him one, and I'm drawing up a proposal for a mini-series called *Iron Maidens* which is basically reinventing the Justice League as a group of women. So, we'll see what happens with that.

CD: Who are your favorite authors? Who were your biggest influences?

Collins: In terms of influences, definitely Flannery O'Connor, J.D. Ballard, William S. Burroughs, Ramsey Cambell and Dennis Etchison. Another big influence in an odd way was Dr. Seuss, if something can be weird and scary and funny at the same time, he knew how to handle it. Some of my favorites have been Clive Barker, K.W. Jeter, Michael McDowall . . . that's a fairly representative handful.

CD: What are some of your recommendations for people who are interested in breaking into the field?

Collins: Anyone who wants to get into the business, I would recommend reading outside of your genre: non-fiction and westerns, high literature, whatever, but don't just stick with reading only in the genre you want to work in. And write a lot, every day if you can. I won't say don't write when you're uninspired, but you should at least force yourself to sit down and think about writing.

CD: Do you believe in extensive outlining?

Collins: My outlines are getting more and more extensive. I might know where the story is going, but I like to outline just for myself so that I can decide how the characters are going to get from point A to point B. But, I don't think you should always stick to the outline you write; if a story wants to go somewhere outside of the outline, I'll let it. But writing's different for every person, I don't believe that what works for me, will necessarily work for someone else. My outlines are normally just plot points written down in a note book, and when I get to that point, I just scratch it off. I'm one of those

people who finishes writing a book and never wants to see the book again. It's like having a house guest who stays around for a year and a half.

CD: Do you ever sit back with one of your own books and read it again?

Collins: Yes, but not for a long time. I really don't want to think about a book for at least half a year. When I have to do publicity for a book that's coming out and people are asking me to describe it, all I can think of is the next book that I'm working on. Dave Barry described going on a book tour as having people producing copies of your book and shoving them right in your face like it was some hideous insect. That's how it feels.

CD: What do you like the most about the writing industry and what do you like the least?

Collins: Having the freedom of being my own boss. There's a certain pleasure in saying "I feel like going to the movies, or taking a walk" when it's two in the afternoon. I also like being able to point at a book or a comic and say: "That's mine, I did that." It has a lot more impact with people than being a plumber and waving your plumbers tools. On the other hand, a plumber makes more money. I don't even really know the difference between the weekend and the week. The part I don't like about being a writer is the insecurity of it. I hate waiting endlessly for a check from the publishers. I'm the last person to get paid, and I think most writers would agree with me that the waiting game is the worst part. Even that doesn't bother me that much, for every good thing, there has to be a counterbalance. As long as the good outweighs the bad, you're still doing okay, and so far the good

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stuff outweighs the bad stuff.

CD: You seem pretty down to earth about your career.

Collins: Well, I had to be. I grew up in a farming family, and I understood all too well that there are two sides to every coin. My family did pretty well, but there were always problems. You pray for rain and then there's too much rain and you pray for the rain to stop. Then the rain goes away and it stays away, and you find yourself praying for rain again. You just have to take what you get and learn to get around the rough spots. You have to make the most of what comes your way. You can control things a little bit better than the weather in this business, but it can still be unpredictable and implacable. If the industry suddenly decides it's had enough of fuzzy elf stories, then you have to write something

else. Or, if people decide they've had enough of westerns or horror novels, you just have to get through it. It's like the horror implosion of the last few years: people are still reading horror novels, they're just not reading all of the novels that come out anymore. You just have to learn to read the signs and not freak out and bail out at the first signs of trouble. The market's soft right now, but if you're really willing to get in there and work at it, you will sell a book.

CD: Do you think the market is changing?

Collins: I think too many people try to read the entrails of goats in this industry. A few years ago everyone was jumping on the serial killer bandwagon as a result of *Silence Of The Lambs*, and suddenly there were a lot of really bad serial killer novels on the shelves, and

instead of reading those, everyone was reading true crime novels. I think the hardest part of being a professional writer is trying to balance your integrity against the need to pay the rent. You want to have artistic value in your work and at the same time make it so that people will want to read your work. I've been accused by a few people of being a mainstream sell out, but that was normally by people who couldn't pay the rent. If you're going to accuse me of being a sell out because you're jealous, then go screw yourself. But if someone I actually respect makes a comment about going the easy way and not doing what they believe I'm capable of, then I'll listen. The old saying is true, don't write your books for an imaginary audience, write your books for yourself. Because if you're not happy with what you're writing, no one else will be either.



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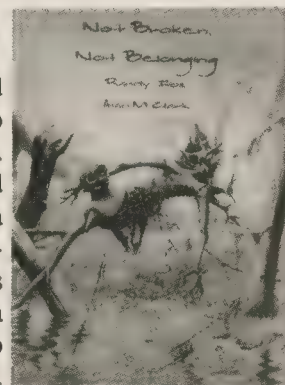
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You know this to be true:

Sometime during the night, somebody came to your place and placed a homing beacon on your car, then painted an invisible target on your forehead.

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You get cut off by six people pulling out of parking spaces, and there's not another car behind you for several miles; you get passed on the right by someone who's in a hurry to beat you to the red light a block away; an eighteen-wheeler tailgates you so closely, you can read the sign that says, "How am I driving?"; a cop follows you for so long, you run out of ways to pretend you don't notice him; your radio gets stuck on Rush Limbaugh's station; and two old guys in golf caps ride the white line in a sixty-five zone.

There's something caught on the windshield wiper, which leaves a smear of impenetrable gunk at

exactly eye level.

When you finally get Limbaugh off the radio, all you can get is either the Dolans or Sonny Block telling little old ladies with \$500,000 in the bank how they can invest wisely for the future.

You have the only car made in the universe where the right-hand outside mirror has to be adjusted manually, and there's no passenger to help you out, so all you can see is either the passenger door, or the sky.

Just as you enter a miles-long construction zone with no exits and no road surface to speak of, you suddenly remember that the spare tire is flat.

Every "Stop" sign in town seems to have been changed to "Go."

You get short-changed at the store, and the clerk wearing that damn smiley face and paper hat takes mortal offense when you point it out; the guy at the gas station has learned his English at the J Carroll Nash School of Expressive Grunting, and his accounting methods from Willie Sutton; and because you're in absolutely no hurry at all, you never hit a red light, which means that you can't stop long enough to get at that really ticked-off wasp crawl-

ing across the inside of your windshield.

You get stuck behind a funeral with a fourteen-cop escort.

The Acme doesn't have any milk except in 20-gallon jugs.

Somebody taller than you remarks on your monk's cap.

You walk into a store and, for no reason at all, check your fly. It's open. Since there's no way you can close it without drawing embarrassing attention to yourself, you either pull your shirt out of your jeans and pray it's long enough, head immediately for a deserted aisle and check the location of those big mirrors in the corner, or hunker down to examine something, anything, on the bottom shelf and pray no one thinks you're doing something disgusting down there.

When you get home, shaken but safe, it starts to pour, and the windows that never ever let in the rain let in the rain faster than you can get to them. At which time, it stops pouring.

When it starts again—usually after you've reopened the windows because it's so stuffy inside—your dog decides he absolutely must go out, now!, or he'll ruin every carpet in the house. Your cat has had a change of life and won't eat any-

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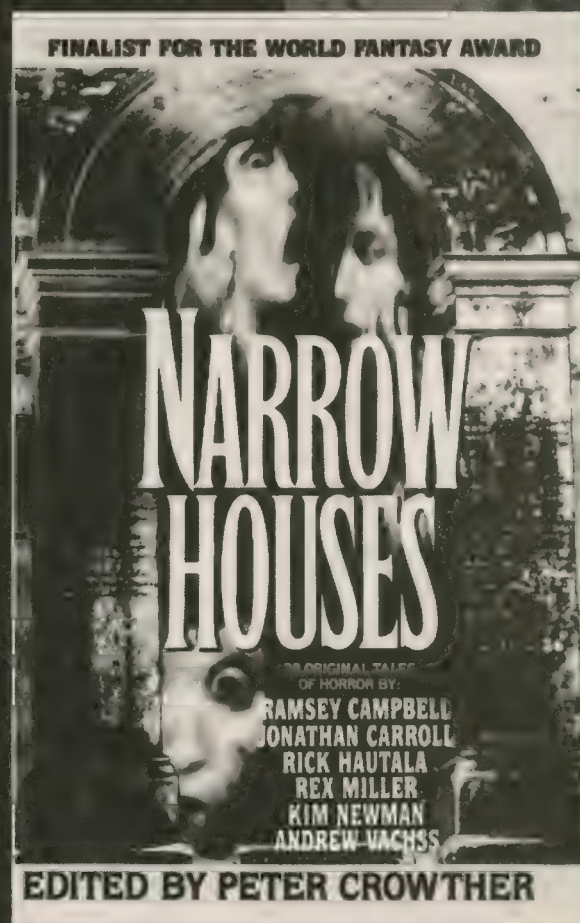
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thing but ocean whitefish in tiny chunks that look like petrified spiders. A zephyr knocks out your cable TV. The guy across the street has bought a motorcycle and practices gunning the engine all afternoon "to clean out the carburetor". The Mormons come—they cheat and take off those skinny black ties so you won't know it's them—and tell you it's "interesting" that you're a pagan. The squirrels figure out how to climb to the top of the bird feeder, the jays don't like it, and there's a war until sunset.

You've been climbing those damn stairs for umpteen years, but today you miss the top one and dislocate your jaw, your ankle, and part of one shoulder.

Your computer starts making noises like your car makes noises.

You try to cram one more thing into the clothes hamper, and the bottom falls out.

There's a three-inch centipede in the bathtub.

When you finally decide the day's not worth living and you lie down on the bed for a nap in hopes of not waking up until tomorrow, the cat sits on your head.

It's the day your son launches headlong into the terrible twos, while your daughter decides boys are good for something after all.

Your wife wants to know if she's fat; your husband wants to know if he still has the same waistline as he did in college.

Your son wants to know if he can spend the summer riding cross-country in a mini-van with his girlfriend and six guys who are only along to help pay for the gas; your daughter accidentally leaves her birth control prescription on the dining room table.

Your wife has unilaterally decided that acting sexy just for you isn't mature, and besides you've been married for 20 years, get a grip, but not on her; your husband has decided that CNN, or the Food Channel, or the Family Channel,

or ESPN2, or Wings Hauser's latest on Cinemax, or the Farm Channel, or Montel Williams, or "America's Funniest Home Videos" is marginally more interesting than that new cleavage bra thing you bought on a whim for your anniversary.

The bed, your knees, and your teeth squeak.

Your wife has the remote control, but she moves too damn fast, and you wonder how she can decide what to watch when she only sees 5 seconds, tops, of anything; your husband has the remote control and takes fordamnever to get wherever the hell he's going, but he never stops at the Discovery or Learning Channels, just at the infomercial for the vacuum thing that cuts your hair.

Your agent says he's going on vacation for four weeks, but he'll

Your husband has the remote control . . . but he never stops at the Discovery or Learning Channels, just at the infomercial for the vacuum thing that cuts your hair.

read your new manuscript as soon as he gets back.

Your editor is on vacation, but she'll get right to your manuscript as soon as she gets back.

The galleys for the new book came today, they were due yesterday, and some beanpod left off the last four paragraphs, but your editor's still on vacation and will take care of it when she gets back.

The editor of your new book calls you twice to talk over a few things, but your agent can't get him on the phone to talk over the damn contracts.

You finish a new story, print it out, proof it, fiddle with it some more, print it out again, decide where to send it, stick it in the envelope, seal the envelope, drop it in the corner mailbox, smile a lot, and realize when you get home that you wrote the same story twelve years ago; or you forgot to include the SASE; or you put the wrong cover letter inside; or you've sent it to the wrong market; or you misspelled the editor's name. Three times.

Your agent calls and tells you that, because of increasing costs, inflation, and smaller advances, he's thinking about raising his percentage; your agent calls to tell you that, because of high volume, little time, and smaller advances, he's thinking about cutting down on the number of his clients; your agent calls to tell you that he's just sold another client's book for over a million bucks and aren't you just thrilled to death for him?

Your editor has jumped ship to another publisher, and no one at the old publisher has the faintest idea what to do with your breakthrough novel because your old editor took all her notes with her; your editor leaves a message on your answering machine, asking you to call her back immediately, but when you call her back immediately, you get her answering machine, or one of those tree things that lands you in the shipping department just before you get cut off, or you get her assistant, who hasn't the faintest idea what the hell you're talking about, but it's moot because everybody left that afternoon for the sales conference in Bermuda; your editor thinks your new book is probably the best you've done in years, and the only editorial suggestion she has is to dump the main character and change the setting from Savannah to London.

Your new book starts in the month of June, but your editor wants you to change that because

there's a character named June too, and she thinks the readers will get confused.

You call a writer friend for support, help, and a mutual life-affirming gripe session and find out his phone's been disconnected, or his wife's just left him, or the bank just took his house, or his agent just died, or he found out his advance wasn't as large as yours, or he has to go bowling with his wife who has, by the way, just bought this really dynamite new cleavage bra

thing so don't call back for at least five or six days.

You have a great idea for a new story, and not a clue how to start it.

Your wife wants you to help her pluck out her grey hairs; your husband wants you to help him out of his easy chair.

John Carpenter or George Romero or Steven Spielberg leaves a message on your phone machine, which dies just before he gives the number where he can be reached.

Your wife decides to keep you around; your husband decides you're not so bad after all; your son decides you're not as stupid as you look; your daughter decides you're not as old as you look.



You know this to be true:
If life was perfect, it would also be damn dull.
And so would your writing.

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VACATION

MATTHEW J. COSTELLO

MATTHEW J. COSTELLO is a regular feature columnist for *Cemetery Dance*, and the author of many critically-acclaimed novels (*Wurm*, *Homecoming*, *See How She Runs*). "Vacation" is his first fiction appearance in *CD*.

Jack went out to check the car—yet again. He tried to believe that he was overly preoccupied with the dangers, that he was letting himself get way too jittery.

He shut the door behind him, the back door to their house. He shut it tight and then looked at it.

I don't want anyone coming out while I'm looking around. No, he thought, I don't need them nervous ... Christie, and the kids. For months, he had balked at the idea, the very *concept* of taking a vacation. Under the circumstances, it was crazy.

But Christie came to him. She put her arms around him, pulled him close, and said:

"Jack—do you know how long it's been ... how long it's been since we've gone *anywhere*? They say it's safe, that the area is secure. It's a safe family place. The kids haven't seen a lake, any water to swim in ... for so long."

Jack nodded. He didn't tell her many of the stories from work. There was no point in telling Christie just how badly things seemed to be going. The city was gone. Completely gone ... New York—the Big Apple—was history. There was no question about it.

Oh, there were some spots, some key sectors that were under control. All of lower Manhattan was fine, supplied by ships on a daily basis, girded by a ring of soldiers and artillery.

And there was a broad strip running up the West Side, nearly to the George Washington Bridge. That was okay. There were still restaurants there, still places where you could go out to eat.

Instead of being eaten.

But the rest of the city was controlled by the others, the Can Heads. They were there and they were spreading ...

Jack's own sector ran from North Yonkers, just up to the suburbs of Westchester. Westchester itself

was a maze of twelve-foot mesh fences and checkpoints. The Can Heads were being contained, that was the official line. In fact, the President announced that in each of the big cities the Can Heads were confined. Yes, and soon they'd be rounded up and placed in camps. Any aggressive action by them would be put down by violent means.

Contained ... rounded-up ...

No fucking way.

The real orders were simple. Kill them. In fact, if you even suspected someone of being one of them, you were to blow their fucking head off. And like sharks, they'd waste some time feeding on their own. Food is fucking food. And Jack knew that—despite orders quite to the contrary—he and the other cops were taking the dead bodies and poisoning them ... leaving them for the others.

Anything, Jack thought, anything to cut down their numbers.

Anything to reduce the sick feeling that there were more of them than us. More of them—and growing, all the fucking time, more and more of them.

Jack turned away from the back door. No one was coming.

He looked at his car. It had been an ordinary station wagon. But then Jack had fitted it with all the necessary items. There was metal shielding to protect the tires from a sniper. The windshield and side windows were all reinforced safety glass, strong enough to stop a bullet. The underbody was protected by a steel shell.

And Jack had helped himself to a nice array of weapons and ammunition from the station, all now secreted below the spare tire, a small armory.

He crouched down. He checked his last modification to the car, the one that made his mouth go dry and cottony. He felt the wires running from the gas tank, to the front, and up—into the dashboard. He fingered the plastic strip covering the wires, holding them flush to the underside of the car.

There was no way it wouldn't work—

If he ever needed it.

No way ...

Jack heard the back door open. He quickly got

up and he heard Simon bickering with his sister, fighting over who got to ride in the back seat, the one that faced to the rear. They both hated it but Jack didn't want them sitting together, squabbling all the way Upstate ...

The luggage sat on the roof rack. Jack stood up ... straightened his pants.

It was time to leave on their vacation.



"I've packed some sandwiches, and juice—"

Christie was sitting beside him. She patted his arm, and Jack smiled, looking out the windshield. It was a beautiful day, with a bright sun sitting in a deep blue sky. It looked like there'd be cool mornings and evenings, while the days would get just hot enough ...

"What kind of sandwiches?" Simon bellowed from the back of the wagon.

Jack could guess this.

"Peanut butter and—"

"Oh, yuck—I'm sick of peanut butter. Got, I hate—"

Jack looked up to the rearview mirror, to the back of Simon's head. "Simon—ease up, will you? It's just for the trip up. We'll have some good meals at the camp."

"I doubt that—" Simon muttered.

Jack chewed at his lip.

Laurie, his little girl, was playing with her doll's hair, grabbing a great hank of hair and pulling it through a tiny hair band. She didn't get involved in the discussion.

Of course, Jack thought, Laurie has always lived this way, she was *used* to the way food was these days. Real meat was a rarity, a special item. Mostly there was beans and pasta, and even peanut butter was getting expensive.

The Great Drought killed the farm belt. Not just wounded it, there wasn't just a bad harvest. It killed it dead. Year after year of drought transformed the nation's bread basket, turning it dry, letting the prehistoric desert in the west slither east, claiming the farmland.

Things were bad here. But in California—a confidential police report said—things were way beyond bad. The whole state might be gone. The first state to be controlled by the Can Heads ...

Not much news got out of California these days.

"Relax," Christie said. And she gave his thigh a squeeze. Jack looked over. She was wearing a pretty summer dress, great red flowers, with bare arms. Her legs were already tanned from hours spent in the garden in their backyard, coaxing tomatoes and raspberries out of the rocky soil.

He smiled. "Okay," he said. "I just got to turn

the switch. Turn the switch, and start the vacation. Try to have some fun."

Every few blocks, leading to the highway, he saw a sector patrolman. It was reassuring, but it was also disturbing. It said that even here, even two dozen miles from New York, from the big city, there was danger.

Even here ...

There was a certain route that had to be followed to the highway. Most of the entrance and exit ramps had been sealed. Now there were only a few ways on and off the Thomas E. Dewey Thruway. You could only enter—or exit—with a pass. And the Emergency Highway Police, a new division of the State Police, would shoot to kill.

"You have the papers?" he said.

Christie popped open the glove compartment.

"All set."

Jack slowed. There was a car in front of him. The highway itself, its six lanes visible just ahead, was deserted.

Not much traffic these days.

Jack inched forward. He looked at the highway. On either side there was a tall mesh fence, topped with spirals of barbed wire. How much fucking protection in that? Jack thought. What the hell good could that do?

Someone could just as easily lob something at us, some explosive, something to stop the car and—

Jack looked down, at the dash, at the switch just near the steering column.

"Jack—they've moved up. Go on ... the booth is empty."

He nodded, and eased the station wagon up to the booth. There was no toll. All the considerable fees—from entry point to exit point and back again—had been paid weeks ago.

The guard, an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder, stepped down to the window.

"Hi, folks. How are you doing today?"

Making small talk. It was a technique. Sometimes they could look normal, almost act normal. But if you talked to them for any length of time, if you chatted to a Can Head, you'd *know*.

Shit, you could sense it—or maybe even smell it on them, on their clothes, on their breath. You'd maybe see a red dollop marking their shirt, the sign of Cain. And still smiling, you'd try to back away, lowering your gun, hoping you could blow the fucker away before he—

"Going on a vacation, eh?"

"Yes," Christie said, smiling, "our first with the kids. We're going to the Paterville Family Camp."

The guard nodded, looking at Jack. "Yes, I hear it's nice up there."

Jack had trouble engaging in the chit-chat, the

little routine the highway cop had.

"Have there been any reports?" Jack said, "any trouble, on the way up?"

The guard laughed, as if it was a silly question.

"No. Nothing for weeks. Been real quiet. I think we've got them on the run. And you've got a good steel mesh fence there. I wouldn't worry."

The guard scanned the back of the wagon, checking out the children.

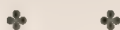
"You have a nice vacation," the guard said, backing away.

He went back to his booth and opened up the gate. It took forever for the whirring engine to sluggishly get the gate up. Then Jack pulled away, onto the highway.

He drove for miles, silent now, glad that Christie let him be quiet. And the only company on the road was a few lonely-looking cars, then a truck, a giant dairy truck.

Couldn't have milk in it, Jack thought. No way there was milk in that truck.

Christie turned on the radio, but the stations were already mostly static, and the warming sound of voices and old music—the only kind available these days—vanished.



Laurie had fallen asleep, and Simon had crawled forward, searching for more chips and juice. He groaned when Christie told him that he was out of luck.

"But I'm hungry," he said.

He was always hungry. No matter how much they stuffed into him, there didn't ever seem to be enough to stop him from whining about more food.

"That's all we had," Jack said. "And besides—we're almost there, Simon, now just sit quietly."

Jack looked left. He thought he saw something, by the side of the highway. And he did, a curled shaving of black, a tire. A retread that exploded, probably stranding a car. He passed more of the tire, another black chunk, just to the side of the road. Just a failed retread, he thought. That was all. Or maybe it was something else. Maybe someone had their tires shot out from under them. That would be nice—lose your tires, and then rumble to a jangly stop, pulling off the deserted highway.

Maybe it happened at night.

And then you'd have to wait, in the dark—wait to see what climbed over the fence, or cut through it. You'd lock yourself in the car, of course. You'd do that. But that wouldn't help, that would only make it worse. You'd have to watch them, prying you out, like opening a can.

Once, on his patrol, Jack found a car like that. There was nothing left inside, it had been picked clean,



no seats, no bones, nothing. Like a metal clam scraped clean by a giant set of teeth. There was just the red spatters—on the ceiling, on the floor, on the broken glass.

Dried spatters where it hadn't been licked clean

...

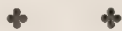
Now—he looked at the fence, gleaming, silvery and secure.

Christie touched his arm.

"It's the next exit, Jack. It's just ahead."

He looked at her, and she smiled at him.

"We're almost there ..."



Moving onto the country roads, they left the security of the highway, with its twelve-foot-high fence, its curled barbed wire.

Jack felt exposed.

"Lock the doors," he said.

Christie pushed down her button, then she reached behind and pushed down Laurie's button.

"Simon, lock your door."

His son shook his head and pushed down the button.

The blue sky was now dotted with big, grayish clouds that drifted across the sky, blotting out the sun. Jack felt chilled sitting in the car.

We're up in the mountains, he thought. Gets cold up here. I wish there was more sunlight.

They passed a house, a small wooden house all burned out. Ugly black beams jutted into the air to support a roof no longer there. He wondered what had caused the fire, and what had happened to the people inside. Then an old gas station flew by, two ancient pumps sitting outside. There seemed to be a general store inside the station, signs advertising Bud Light, Marlboro ...

Jimmy Dean's Pork Sausage.

"How far to Paterville?" he said to Christie.

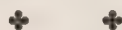
He didn't do a very good job of keeping the edge out of his voice.

"Just a few more miles," she said. "You turn off just ahead, onto Old Sanfellow's Road. Then the camp is just up a hill. There's a map ... see."

Jack nodded. Good. We're close. The camp touted its security. Its 24-hour security force. Its electronic surveillance and electrified fence.

Maybe when I'm in there, when my family is behind all that security, maybe then I'll be able to relax, Jack thought.

But he doubted it.



"Good to see you folks." The fat man looked up to the sky. "It *was* a beautiful day." The man smiled.

"Some nasty clouds kinda snuck in." He clapped his hands together. "No matter, let's get you to your cabin and start your vacation."

Jack watched the man lower a hand to Laurie's head and rustle her hair. "How's that sound?"

Laurie smiled.

The man, Camp Director Ed Lowe, is doing his best to put us at ease, Jack knew. Must get a lot of paranoid people coming here. He's trying his best to radiate as much warmth as possible.

They walked to the cabin, past the dining hall and a large room that Lowe pointed out was the family rec room.

"We got ping-pong, pool, even some video games," he said.

He came close to Jack. "You seem a bit jittery, friend. Any trouble on the way up here?"

Jack shook his head. "No." He forced himself to smile. "Nothing at all. It's just—"

Jack looked around at the camp, at the people he could see down at the lake ... kids jumping into the now-gray water from a diving platform. Little toddlers dashing around on the thin strip of beach, happily falling down onto the sand. It looked wonderful.

He took a breath. And he said:

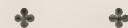
"I'm a cop ... I'm in charge of one of the sectors. Right on the city border."

Lowe made a big "O" with his mouth. "Oh—I see. I guess you've seen a lot, Jack. Some real bad stuff." Lowe clapped a hand around Jack's shoulder. "I hope that we can help you forget that stuff here." Then, tighter, pulling Jack real close. "I hope that you and your family have a real good time here."

The cabins, a line of small brown cabins that stretched from the beach, around the curve of the lake, into the woods, were just ahead.

Jack looked behind him, and he saw his kids, open-mouthed, grinning, eager to get in the water, to have fun, to play.

And Jack took a breath.



"Knock-knock?"

Jack looked up from his suitcase. A man and a woman stood at the screen door to their cabin. Laurie and Simon had already torn off to the beach while he and Christie unpacked.

"Hi, folks," the man said. "I hope we're not interrupting but me, and Sharon, we saw that you just arrived. We're—" the man looked to his left—"right next door, and we thought we'd welcome you."

Christie touched Jack's arm, squeezed it. He looked at her. Her smile said, *relax*. Stop being a cop. Invite the nice people in.

Jack went over to the screen door and opened it.



"Hi," he said. "We're still getting settled here."

The man looked at the room, taking in the open luggage, the beds filled with clothes.

"Oh, don't want to disturb you. Just being friendly."

Christie came forward, her hand extended. "Oh, no—thank you. That's very nice." She saw so few people these days ...

She introduced herself and Jack.

"We're the Blairs," the man said. "Tom and Sharon ... Our two kids are probably down at the lake already. You're going to like it here. It's safe ... and it's fun."

Tom Blair grabbed his wife's hand and squeezed it tight. "We're having a real nice time here. You folks are going to *love* it."

People being friendly ... it was hard for Jack to accept the concept. There wasn't any room for friendliness in this world. Not anymore.

"How long have you been here?"

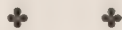
Tom Blair said, "Three days. And we're signed up for two more. Gonna hate to leave."

His wife spoke, quietly, a woman with a whispery voice, as if she could be scared of the world. "Maybe you'd like to have dinner with our family. Everyone sits at these big tables."

"Very homey," Tom said.

Christie nodded. "Sure. We'd love to."

Tom Blair winked. "See you then."



The dining room was filled with noisy kids and babies crying and the clatter of cheap silverware clanging against plates.

Laurie and Simon had had a great time swimming. Laurie only wading to the edge of the lake, while Simon swam to the float and dove off.

Now, though, they were complaining about the food. There was a lot of it, but it was a pasty bean mixture. A gloopy dish that had Simon rolling his eyes and pushing his plate away.

"This is good food?" he said.

"Simon ..." Jack said.

"Yeah," Tom Blair said. "The cuisine's not quite up to what the brochure said. But it's filling—and there's plenty of it."

"Oh, goody," Simon said, and the Blair kids, two boys, ten and nine, both laughed.

"There's a lot of people here," Jack said. "They must do some business ..."

"Yes," Blair said. "But you know there's one thing that confuses me. Last night, I—"

But Ed Lowe was at a podium in the front of the room and his amplified voice suddenly filled the hall.

"Good evening, Paterville families! And let's wel-

come the newcomers!"

On cue, the hall resounded with a hundred voices booming, "Welcome newcomers!"

"Now listen up, families. I just got the updated weather forecast for tomorrow," Lowe said. "And it's going to be *beautiful*. And for tonight, we're having a sing-along by the big fireplace, and there will be games for the kids in the rec room."

Jack looked around as Lowe spoke. He saw so many families, so many kids. After years of leaving his house and stopping Can Heads—killing them—this all looked so peaceful, so safe.

Then—he thought:

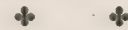
Why don't I feel safe?

Tom Blair stood up.

"Maybe we'll see you at the sing-along?"

Jack nodded.

"Yeah," he said. "Maybe you will ..."



"You're not sleeping," Christie said.

They had made love. First, they'd read books, waiting for the kids to fall asleep. And then Christie had shut her light off, and then his light, before she slid under the covers, working on him, making him hard.

While he listened.

There were noises outside.

He heard noises outside.

He thought that he heard gunshots, the sound of gates opening or shutting, or someone yelling—

No. It's just the sound of the woods, the lake. A screeching, the wind rustling leaves.

The sounds faded—and he had moaned.

"You're not sleeping," Christie said. He looked to her and her eyes glistened wetly in the blackness, catching the light.

"I—I can't sleep," he said.

It wasn't the first time he had trouble sleeping. Not by a longshot. And it was getting to be a problem ...

She nodded. "Are you worried? I mean, how safe do you want us to be?"

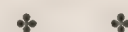
"No. Everything looks fine here. Couldn't be better. Still—there's something that bothers me."

She made a small laugh. "Well, when you figure it out, be sure and tell me. But now I'm going to sleep. I want to enjoy the sun and the water tomorrow."

She turned away.

The room was cold. In minutes, he heard her rhythmic breathing, a reminder that he couldn't sleep, that sleep would only come when he was too tired to think anymore, to wonder ...

What's bothering me?



He was in bed, rubbing his eyes. The door to the cabin was open. It was morning ... that fast. Morning.

Christie stood there, cute and sexy in a great two-piece bathing suit. Jack wondered: When was the last time I saw her in a bathing suit?

He leaned up on one elbow.

"I'm taking the kids down to the beach." She peered over her sunglasses. "See you there, sleepy head?"

"Yeah, what time—?" He turned left. It was after nine. "I'll see you there."

The screen door slammed shut.

Jack sat up in bed. And then he remembered. He remembered his night, all the thoughts he'd had, until he finally came to one thing he could hold onto. The one thing that really bothered him ...

The people, all those families in the dining hall.

Some of them—a lot of them—acted as if they'd been here a long time, as if this wasn't a vacation place, some new place to visit. They acted—what?

As if this was their home.

Maybe it was just a strange feeling. Maybe it was just his cop paranoia, seeing strangeness, sickness everywhere.

He got up, pulling on his jeans and a T-shirt. He went to the screen door. He heard kids playing by the beach.

Then he looked left, to the cabin where the Blairs were staying.

It's a crazy idea, he thought. Crazy—but it wouldn't hurt. It wouldn't hurt to ask Tom Blair if he had the same feeling.

I could laugh about it, Jack thought. You get crazy ideas when you're a cop. Pretty damn funny ...

He walked down the wooden steps to the ground and hurried over to the Blair's cabin. He walked up the wooden steps and knocked on the door ... and it swung open, ajar, creaking ...

A woman was inside, but it wasn't Blair's wife.

"Oh, I was looking for the family staying here."

The woman looked up at him. She was putting clean sheets on the bed. She had a cart with towels, small wrapped packets of soap. Jack looked at her face, her eyes.

She looked as if she had been caught doing something.

The woman shook her head.

Then she smiled, quickly. She put a smile on her face.

"Oh, they left. They left the Camp. They had to leave."

The words came fast. Too fast.

I know when people are lying. I *know* that. Always have.

Jack was about to say something, about how the Blairs were staying a few more days, and she must have

made a mistake. But he looked around the room. The cabin was empty. No luggage. Swept clean. They were gone.

Jack's throat felt tight. He nodded. "Oh—okay," he said. He turned back to the door.

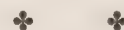
He felt the woman watching him while he opened the screen door, then let it slam shut behind him. There was no morning sun outside, no nice day, like Ed Lowe predicted. Instead, it was cloudy, cool.

Jack thought of his family, down by the water, swimming with the other families ...

He put on shoes and grabbed his wallet, his car keys ...

Because that's all we need, he thought. That's all we need.

If it isn't too late. Oh, Christ, if it isn't—



He reached the beach. He saw Simon diving, clumsily, without any grace. Boy doesn't get any practice, he thought. Not enough fucking practice 'cause there's not too many safe places to swim, not too many pools you'd send your kids to—

He felt a hand on his back.

"You have a good night's sleep, Jack?"

Jack turned around and saw Ed Lowe, standing there.

He nodded. "Fine. It was ... very comfortable."

Lowe smiled. "The mountain air. Makes you sleep like a baby."

Lowe came closer. The wind changed. The Director nodded towards Jack's family. "They're having a good time. You did the right thing coming here."

Jack smiled back. He knows, he thought. He knows I saw the empty cabin, and that I asked questions, and now—now—

"We have a nice place here," Lowe said. "A real nice place for families."

And Jack looked at Lowe's eyes, at the runny egg whites lined with red, then down to the coils of fat around the man's neck. His big, strong-looking hands, with pudgy fingers.

Jack licked his lips. He doesn't look—

"Maybe this is *your* kind of place?" Lowe said, moving even closer, the wind carrying his smell to Jack's nostrils.

No. You don't get that fat on beans, on soy paste, on—

The smell. Jack knew what it was. He got it a lot, on the streets. It was the smell of meat, the tangy scent of blood. Lowe's lips were red, a Santa Claus red, rosy cheeks and beet red lips.

Jack watched Lowe run his tongue across his teeth, searching, scouring.

There was something there, something stringy,

dangling from a tooth.

Jack couldn't breathe. The smell, the voices squealing by the water. He felt his car keys pressing into his thigh.

"Well—if you'll excuse me. I've got to—"

Jack walked past Lowe, forcing himself to breathe regularly. It's okay, he told himself. Lowe doesn't know anything. Jack walked over to Christie, sitting in a chair low to the sand.

"Get Laurie," he whispered to her.

Christie turned around. "What? Jack, what do you—"

He put a hand on her shoulder and squeezed tightly. "Please. Don't raise your voice. Please, be—"

He turned around, expecting to see Lowe there, watching, spying on him. I'm not crazy, am I?

Then back to Christie. "Get Laurie and walk to the car. I'll call Simon and follow you ..."

"Whatever for? What are you—"

He pinched her shoulder, enough to cause some pain, enough to let her know that she should just fucking *do it*.

When Jack stood up, he saw people watching him, looking.

Welcome newcomers ...

He moved to the edge of the lake just as Simon surfaced.

"Simon! Come here."

For a moment it looked as if the boy wouldn't

come, that he'd make Jack shout to him while everyone watched. But then Simon kicked back and swam to him.

Jack waited, while the cool breeze off the lake played with his hair, while—all of a sudden—it got quiet on the beach.

"What's up, Dad?"

Jack leaned down close to Simon. He whispered.

"Simon. Don't respond to what I say. Don't do anything. If you understand, just nod a bit."

"Yeah, but—"

Jack shook his head. "Quiet! Don't say a word. Just—when I start off the beach, you follow me. Do you understand?"

Simon nodded.

There was no sound on the beach now, and Jack's whisper felt thunderous.

"Just follow me back to the car, as fast as you can. Don't look back, don't do anything ..."

The boy was shivering. He wasn't stupid, and Jack's tone had cut through his annoyance and confusion.

"Now, good ... ready ..."

Jack stood up straight, turned, and walked off the beach, moving fast, not running, but walking with big strides while Simon, barefooted, trotted to keep up.

✱ ✱



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He was afraid that when he got to the car, Christie and Laurie wouldn't be there, or maybe—God—their car wouldn't be there.

There were only a few cars there.

That was it. All along, and I didn't understand that, he thought. All those people, and only a few cars.

Welcome newcomers ...

But Christie was there. And Laurie was sitting in the back. The locks were down. But when Christie saw him she leaned across and opened the driver and then the passenger door.

Jack picked up his pace. He dug out his car keys.

"Owl!" Simon said. He must have stepped on a stone, Jack thought, but he didn't stop.

He popped open the back door, and then his door.

"Get in," he said.

They slammed their doors together. Jack stuck the key in the ignition and turned it, fearing that it wouldn't turn over, that the car's insides had been trashed.

That's what I'd do, Jack thought. Rip the guts rights out.

But the car turned over. He pushed down the lock on his door, and Simon copied him. Jack looked back to the lake, to the trail leading to the beach, but he didn't see anybody following.

He pulled away.

And Christie—took a breath—and said: "Now can you tell me what this is about?"

Jack looked back at Laurie. He tried to protect her, to keep the badness away. But Christie needed to know.

"They're here," he said. "God—in this camp."

Christie laughed. "You've lost it. Now I know it. Why on earth do you—"

He looked at her as he pulled onto the gravel road leading to the gate out.

I'll ram right through that fucking gate if I have to, he thought.

"The Blairs. They were staying for two more days, and now they're gone."

"Their plans probably changed, Jack. Why do you—"

"The chamber maid cleaning their room—she was hiding something. I can tell, Christie. I know when people lie. It's my job."

"Mommy," Laurie said. "Daddy's scaring me. Tell him to stop—"

"Then this Ed Lowe guy tracked me down. As if he had heard that I found out something, that I *suspected*. Fat Ed Lowe ... How the hell do you think he got so fat? And—God—I smelled it. On his breath. I tell you, I smelled it. And his teeth. They weren't clean, they were still filled with stringy bits of—"

The gate was ahead, just around the curve, past a

tall stand of pines.

"Dad—hey, Dad, there's somebody—" Simon leaned forward, pointing at the road.

The road ... filled with people.

They were carrying things. Sticks, bats, and—catching the dull gray morning light—silvery things. Ed Lowe was in the front, and there were children there, too.

He thought of what Lowe said.

A good place for families.

As if he was saying: You could live here too. We could *use* someone like you.

Jack had guns, but there were too many of them ...

"Hold on," he said, and he floored the car.

Which was exactly what they wanted him to do. They had prepared for him.

They parted, exposing the gravel road, and the giant tree trunk spread across it. The car rammed into it and then stopped dead.

There was a popping noise, the sound of the tires being hacked.

Primitive. Prehistoric. The way you'd bring down a mastodon.

Laurie was crying, bleating, "Daddy, Daddy ..."

Simon, sweet boy, good boy, whispered to him, so calm. "Should I get the guns, Dad?"

Simon had found them. Simon had been worried, too. He knew his Dad had brought guns ...

Christie grabbed his leg. "Oh, God, Jack. Oh, no—"

Last year, when the food ran out, when the meat stopped, something had happened. People changed. There was no explanation for the sudden outbreak of packs, a cult of cannibalism. There were just a few small groups—Can Heads, the newspapers called them. Except one scientist said yes, this was probably the way the dinosaurs vanished.

Feeding on each other ...

As if some switch had been thrown, some end-of-the-world switch. After all the suffering, the homeless people, the poverty, the hunger. Some final switch was thrown. And this was the way it would end.

They were smashing at the car's windows.

The safety glass didn't shatter, but a web-like mesh of cracks appeared. Eventually it would give out.

They surrounded the car. Jack saw the other families, their mouths open, wet lips, teeth exposed. They were angry. This probably wasn't how they liked to do it. This was probably was too undignified.

Christie was crying.

"Jack, please. Our babies ..."

The back window gave out, and now he heard the voices, the snarling of the Can Heads, this new species, human cannibals ready to feed on their prey.

Jack turned and looked at his wife.

Then back to Laurie. She had her hands over her ears, and she was crying, hopelessly trying to drown out the screams, the horrible sounds.

He heard them on the roof. Crawling on the roof. It was a feeding frenzy. Jack had imagined what it would be like—to be caught by them—and now it was happening.

We fell in the trap ... he thought.

He looked at Christie. Her eyes begged for him to do something.

I will ...

"I love you," he said.

The window by Simon caved in. The boy yelped, and screamed, "Dad!"

There was no more time.

Jack fingered the switch by the steering column.

For a moment he thought: What if it doesn't

work? Oh, God, what if somehow it doesn't work?

He threw the switch.

The battery fired a spark into the over-sized gas tank.

There was the tiniest second of hesitation—and then the explosion ripped from behind him, with searing heat, burning, painful—the screams of his family mixing with the roar.

Merciful ...

Ending everything in one blessed, white-hot flash of pain.

And then the screaming, the crying, the smashing, all vanished ...

And the gravel road was quiet.

— CD

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LETTERS FOR THE EDITOR

Dear Cemetery Dance:

I was upset to read Bob Morrish's inquiry about my short story collection in his interview with Tom Monteleone of Borderlands Press. ("I've heard a rumor that Dan Simmons wrote an introduction for [*Swamp Foetus*], but that ... for certain reasons, Poppy didn't like it, and asked that it not be printed." —Morrish, *CD*, Spring '94.) Tom tactfully suggested getting the full story from the parties involved. While I found it less than kind of Morrish to bring up this matter, he is not responsible for whatever ugly rumors may be circulating. The full story is personal and painful for me, but I would rather make it known than allow speculation of this nature to continue.

When I contracted with Borderlands to publish a collection of my short stories, I asked Dan Simmons to write an introduction for it. Along with Harlan Ellison and Edward Bryant, Dan had helped me professionally by recommending me to his agent, Richard Curtis, and by giving me a blurb for my first novel. In May of 1992, when I received the introduction Dan wrote for *Swamp Foetus*, I was very pleased with the piece. Then I stupidly let John Skipp read it. As any number of you may know, I was romantically involved with Skipp at the time. To condense things (but not much), Skipp decided that Dan's intro was actually a *cleverly disguised personal attack on him*. Please don't ask me how, because I really can't explain, but if you have ever known Skipp you may understand. We went round and round about the matter for weeks, via many interminable phone conversations clearly illustrating the hell of all relationships, and the upshot of it was that he threatened to have nothing more to do with me if I allowed the introduction to run as it stood. I was (a) still enamored enough to care, (b) still dumb enough to think he could hurt my career if he so chose, and (c)

just getting started on my second novel and finding it difficult to concern myself with other projects, petty jealousies, etc.

What Skipp would have liked was for me to bag Dan Simmons' introduction and ask HIM to write a new one. I wasn't about to do that, so in an ill-advised attempt to please everyone, I asked Dan for a needless revision and ended up pleasing no one. The situation grew so uncomfortable all around that withdrawing the intro seemed the only option. I feel that I made a series of naive, poorly informed decisions, but the matter was such a wretched mix of business and personal matters that I didn't feel I could turn to anyone for advice or support. This incident was also the beginning of the end of my relationship with John Skipp, for which I bless it.

As far as I am concerned, Dan Simmons was the only one who handled the situation with a modicum of grace. I have since explained this silly mess to him, and I hope he has forgiven me for wasting his time. His introduction has been restored in the Borderlands trade edition of *Swamp Foetus* and will be proudly used in all future editions, including the Dell and Penguin UK paperbacks scheduled for 1995.

Skipp is out of my life forever, though convincing him to go was far more difficult than it should have been. I now live with two wonderful men who are very supportive of my work, and I have had my life's fill of long-distance relationships with egomaniacal horror writers. I hope anyone who has heard anything about this matter will now understand how it really went down. I cannot excuse my own naivete and bad judgment, but I can assure you that I am far, far wiser now.

Best,

Poppy Z. Brite

While I will admit that Doug Winter's reference to Dean Koontz in his Argento article in the Winter 1994 issue of *CD* may have been a trifle blunt, it was, I firmly believe, a valid critical assessment and certainly not a personal attack upon Bestseller Koontz—"whose only redeeming virtue is not so much quality but quality control—the ability to deliver not necessarily great, not even necessarily good, but simply consistent project year after year after year ..."

On the other hand, Koontz's paranoid raving, whimpering like a spoiled child, and personally vilifying Doug Winter (for some 2-1/2 pages) indeed constitutes a personal attack and not critical assessment, even though he may have couched the heart of the matter in his line-by-line analysis of Doug's typically informal discourse in drafting his regular column. Were he evaluating a formal essay, for, say, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Saturday Review*, or the *Washington Post* (all counted amongst the prestigious venues that have included Mr. Winter's formal literary criticism), then the breaches of formal syntax, diction, etc., Koontz cites would assuredly be in order. However, in this case, when comparing Doug's column to, for example, those of (highly respected) fellow columnists Paul Sammon, Charles Grant, or Ed Gorman, the somewhat prissy and priggish outrage over nuances bares itself to be nothing more than niggling and nitpicking, attempting to draw attention, with verbal sleight-of-hand, from the substance of the matter ... SUBSTANCE. While he may be a bestseller (in the sense of a second-place literary Burger King to King Stephen's MacDonald's ...), what I have read of Koontz's work, in my own opinion, may possess a fine degree of linguistic polish and movie-ready surfeit of action and melodrama, but it lacks any real substance or lasting literary value. Now, that's fine and dandy, for what it's worth, but it's still (in the immortal terminology of one of my favorite authors, David Schow) "Mind Cheetos." You gobble them down, and the pleasing crunch and fleeting, synthetic taste creates a momentary craving, but there's nothing to stay with you, nothing to nourish the spirit, as do the works of those authors Mr. Winter has publicly lauded—Clive Barker, Stephen King, Ramsey Campbell, and Thomas Ligotti, to name but a few.

Sadly, it would seem that, to use Koontz's own, over-repeated (ad nauseum), personal buzzword, this "critic manque" ("defective or flawed critic," to put it less pretentiously) lacks the ability to recognize literary concepts beyond the superficial. To quote a line (possibly not verbatim) from the lowest-denominator sitcom, "Married With Children," "Al, you can't go through life ordering your dinner through a clown's head."

Also beyond sleight-of-hand, what Koontz tries to slide by the reader is the difference between valid literary criticism (whether one adjudges it right or wrong) and personal attack. Not surprising. What is "gratuitous, juvenile, and always unintentionally amusing" in these "swipes at me" Mr. Winter's allegedly takes? Read it over. Don't be awed by the illusion Koontz strives to conjure. Judge for yourself. Now, to quote Koontz: "When I was one of those struggling to establish Horror Writers of America, Mr. Winter behaved in one instance like a spoiled child ...," "... I assumed that naivete explained at least some of his behavior ...," "... in putting out the fire that he had set, I avoided using his name in order to spare him embarrassment ...," "This is not a gracious man, however, not even by Roseanne Arnold's definition of 'gracious,' and ever since, he has repaid that courtesy with vindictiveness." For those who may have missed Koontz's letter, it gets even more petty, pretentious and vindictive: "He's the horror genre's equivalent of Tonya Harding's inept bodyguard, meanspirited but simultaneously comic, as he flails away with his collapsible metal baton, metaphorical variety."; "I have never responded to him previously, because the piles of fine reviews that I receive and the steadily increasing sales obviously annoy him more than anything I could say."; "Mr. Winter is an indefatigable conventiongoer and fan writer ... because he has neither the talent nor the discipline to create anything worthwhile of his own. While costumed as a person of accomplishment, he is often unkind and meanspirited to other writers, many of them young, who do not reply in kind because they believe that he will attack them in print or conversation and damage their reputations."; "I wonder what Dario Argento must have done to induce Mr. Winter to turn on him so savagely? A telephone call unreturned? A party invitation never extended? I'm not a fan of Mr. Argento's work, largely because of the gore, but if he exhibits this much common sense in personal relationships, I'll probably give his films another look."

Koontz not only seems to find it within the reach of his skewed and defective thread of logic to dismiss a respected attorney (Winter), partner in a major international firm, and *professional* writer/critic as some ill-mannered child (in my personal estimation), he displays overt clinical signs of paranoia in his whining, persecution-filled discourse, underscored by his fixation with the egocentric, god-complex "Me" syndrome. This type of surface superiority usually masks a personality, at the core, suffering from extremely low self-esteem. Not a surprise, then, when we find, for a bestseller, he displays a very thin skin in his apparent inability to shrug off unfavorable criticism in a mature and gentlemanly manner.

His whole irrational diatribe makes me feel like screaming at Koontz: "Let your skin toughen a bit,

Laddie Buck, there's far better but infinitely less (financially) successful writers taking it on the chin every day and coming back for more ..." Try this maxim on for size: "The higher you climb, the greater the visibility, the greater the expectations of quality, the more subject to the scrutinizing eye you become."

Personally, I'd suggest Koontz look up the meanings of the terms "libel," "slander" and "defamation of character" in his no-doubt wellworn and cherished copy of Webster's Unabridged, as Mr. Winter is not only a respected writer and critic, but also a practicing

member of the bar ... It might also behoove him to occasionally peer into the mirror while pontificating. And, by the way, a trip down to Chapel Hill to Doc Wagner's for some preffessional sessions "on the couch" (i.e., "headshrinking" and a "reality check") might not hurt Mr. Bestseller, either ...

All the best,

t. Winter-Damon

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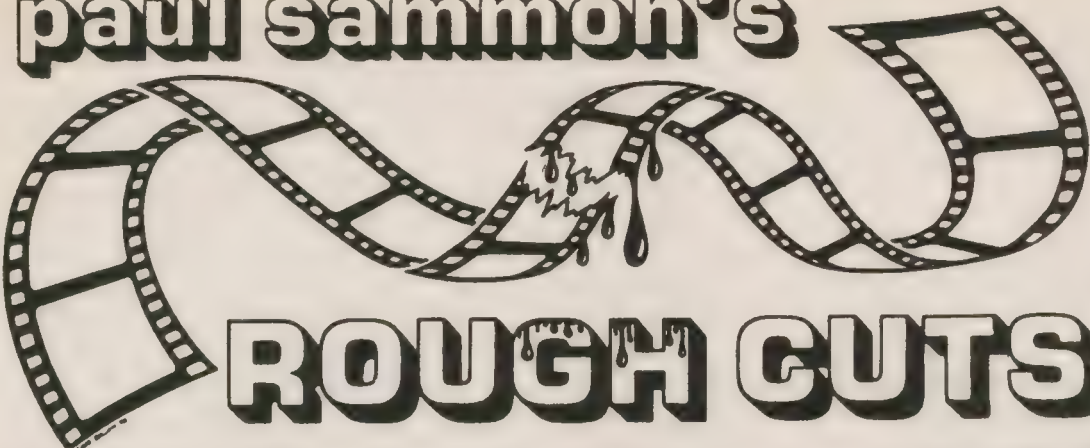
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ROUGH CUTS

The date?

July 27, 1994.

Exactly 45 days since the O.J. Simpson thing. The latest L.A. craze . . . before that it was the Menendez Brothers. Before *that* the earthquake. Then the fires. The riot. The floods.

Anyway, it wasn't two days after Nicole S. and that waiter guy died for the history books that I heard my first O.J. joke.

This instant morbid humor fascinates me — who comes up with these things? *Where* do they come from? How do they so quickly spread? Who's the first person to make the first one up?

But I digress.

Welcome to the 15th installment of *Rough Cuts*, a column marking this effort's fourth anniversary. An occasion prompting the following — four years? Godalmighty! *Forty-eight months* of Paul Naschy videos and backbiting fanzines and overpriced laserdiscs?!?

Well, yeah. So maybe we should do something special about it. Throw a little party, perhaps. With a grab-bag of news, views and reviews, of good books and tapes.

And to kick it all off (you knew I was coming back to this right?), here are three of my favorite O.J. Simpson jokes.

Presented solely for the sake

of posterity, of course.

- 1) "Knock knock."
"Who's there?"
"O.J."
"O.J. who?"
"Ok, you're on the jury."

- 2) Q. — Did you hear what Michael Jackson said to O.J. Simpson?

A. — "Don't worry, O.J. I'll take care of the kids."

- 3) "What do you drink for breakfast?"
"Orange juice. You?"
"Grapefruit juice."
"Why?"
"That O.J.'ll kill ya."

Moving on, my Dead Elvis anthology (*The King is Dead: Tales of Elvis Post-Mortem*), just published by Delta Books and featuring the likes of Clive Barker, Roger Ebert, Harlan Ellison and Lou Reed, should be at your local bookstore. Check it out. As for the second anthology I've been telling you about, the gut-punching *Splatterpunks 2: Over the Edge*, this mostly-femme followup to *Splatterpunks 1* was recently rescheduled for an April '95 release. Even though it was originally due out this September.

Bummer. In the meantime,

while you're waiting, why not explore how I'd write a (not so) traditional English ghost story? That effort's entitled "The Wedding Party". A novella I contributed to *Ghosts*, the new HWA anthology edited by Peter Straub and Marty Greenberg. Publisher Tom Monteleone's *Borderlands Press* should now have a special hardcover edition of this book ready for purchase; write Tom at P.O. Box 146, Brooklandville MD, 21022 for more details.

Ghosts will also hit mainstream bookstores after Pocket Books releases their own, mass-market edition of Peter & Marty's anthology in early 1995. Which is just a few months before my *Future Noir: The Ultimate Blade Runner Book* rolls out, from Harper Collins. Now, if you throw in *another* Sammon opus (*The Christmas Carol Trivia Book*, November '94, Citadel), you'll see that 1994 will go down as the year I was busier than a bartender at a Shriner's convention.

But wait a sec — is this a party, or a promotion? Right — let's get down to ragin'! I've got *stacks* of Big Fun to pass around this time out, basically 'cause I spent a good chunk of June lying flat on my back recovering from right inguinal hernia surgery. Which meant popping lots of lovely pain killers named

Vicodin and blearily eyeballing dozens of tapes.

Now I'm gonna subject you to the same torture.

Is this a happening anniversary, or what?

* *

SINISTER CINEMA

If I had to pick one word to describe *Sinister Cinema's* catalog, it would be "oldies". Beloved, classic oldies, with an emphasis on the 50's & 60's schlock that poured the foundation for an entire sub-structure of trash-film criticism.

Now *Sinister* is offering a wonderfully budget-conscious way to stock up on a number of their excellent titles. How? Through their limited-offer, three hour long (!), special edition "Drive-In Double Feature" tapes. Single videos that offer two films on each cassette, many of which played together during their original runs, and cost only \$19.95. Plus \$2.05 for postage and handling (cheap!). Also included on each tape are a dynamite assortment of "drive-in snack bar commercials, promos, count-downs, previews of coming attractions and much more." All on quality stock, recorded at SP speed!

What follows is a recommended baker's dozen of *Sinister's* drive-in classics. Each tape is worth the investment; just decide which double-bill works best for you. However, since I do list so many of them, there's no space left to review these titles. A pain, I know, but hopefully a minor one, since plot details on the following are common knowledge anyway. Besides, I have indicated which trailers appear on what tape.

You should also know that virtually all prints used in *Sinister Cinema's* Drive-In line have either been partially upgraded or totally remastered from newly acquired source material. Therefore, I've indicated major upgrades/remasters with a

star (★) on the left-hand side of the appropriate tape. Also, when ordering, please ask for each tape by number; ordering numbers are parenthesized on the top line of every entry.

Finally, *Sinister's* Double Feature offer ends November 30, 1994.

When that date rolls around, bubba, these babies are gone.

(★) DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 2 (#DI-O2): *The Horror Chamber of Doctor Faustus* (dubbed version of *Eyes Without A Face*)/*The Manster*

Trailers include: *The Brain That Wouldn't Die*, *Invasion of the Star Creatures*, *Tormented*.

(★) DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 3 (#DI-O3): *Devil's Partner/Creature From the Haunted Sea*.

Trailers include: *Madman of Mandorras* (aka *They Saved Hitler's Brain*), *The Hands of Orlac*, *Brides of Dracula*, *Curse of the Werewolf*.

(★) DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 4 (#DI-O4): *Attack of the Giant Leeches/A Bucket of Blood*.

Trailers include: *Wasp Woman*, *Beast From Haunted Cave*, *House on Haunted Hill*, *The Bat*.

(★) DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 6 (#DI-O6): *The Wasp Woman/Beast From Haunted Cave*.

Trailers include: *The Bat*, *House on Haunted Hill*, *Ma Barker's Killer Brood*, *Journey to the Lost City*, *Horror of Dracula*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Hammer version).

(★) DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 14 (#DI-14): *Horror Hotel/The Head*.

Trailers include: *The Horrible Dr. Hichcock*, *The Awful Dr. Orloff*.

(★) DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 26 (#DI-26): *Hercules in the Haunted World/Castle of Terror* (aka *Castle of Blood*).

Note: Last issue I raved about a recently upgraded *Castle of Blood* print from *Something Weird Video*. However, the *Castle of Blood* on view in *Sinister's* double-feature (where it's billed under its alternate title, *Castle of Terror*) is actually superior to *Something Weird's* version. Making this the best-looking, best-sounding print of director Antonio Margheriti's shadow-drenched Gothic confection.

Trailers include: *Pajama Party/The Evil Eye*.

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 30 (#DI-30): *Count Dracula's Great Love/The Vampire's Night Orgy*

Trailers include: *The Twilight People*, *Cannibal Girls*

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 35 (#DI-35): *Battle of the Worlds/Atom Age Vampire*.

Trailers include: *Horror Hotel*, *The Hands of Orlac*.

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 37 (#DI-37): *Night Tide/Battle Beyond the Sun*.

Trailers include: *The Mysterians*, *Gorath* (without its elusive giant walrus, alas...), *The Snake Woman*.

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 43 (#DI-43): *The Magic Sword/Dr. Blood's Coffin*.

Trailers include: *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, *The Horrible Dr. Hichcock*.

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 50 (#DI-50): *Curse of the Devil/Tower of Screaming Virgins*.

Trailers include: *Raw Meat* (aka *Death Line*), *Blood-Orgy of the She-Devils*.

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 51
(#DI-51): *Kill Baby Kill/Fangs of the Living Dead*.

Trailers include: *Scream and Scream Again*, *The Vampire Beast Craves Blood* (aka *The Blood-Beast Terror*), *Change of Habit* (!).

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE 53
(#DI-53): *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla/Bride of the Gorilla*.

Trailers include: *When World's Collide*, *Dracula's Daughter*, *The Mummy's Tomb*.

★ ★ *Rough Cuts* also recommends these other *Sinister* titles: *The Checkered Flag* (D: William Greffe), *Fabiola* (1951: Alessandro Blasetti), *The Last Reunion* (1955: Leonard Brett), *The Man Who Lived Again* (1936: Robert Stevenson), *Non-Stop New York* (1937: Robert Stevenson).

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RATINGS & SYMBOLS GUIDE

Where applicable, all videos and discs are rated on the 4-star system. 4 stars are swell, one star is swill (★ - ★★★★★).

A sample review, showing an explanation for key symbols found on each heading, follows:

Title (Year of release-Country of Release) RATING, COLOR/BW, SUBTITLED/DUBBED, GENRE, PRINT, QUALITY, (PQ): POOR/FAIR/GOOD

LASERDISC RELEASING COMPANY D: (Director) W: (With)

* *

SOMETHING WEIRD

If "oldies" describes *Sinister Cinema*, "Nudies" nails *Something Weird*. Yet this friendly Seattle-based company (which prides itself on the quality of its prints) has more to offer than silicon boobies or cellulitic hams. As witnessed by this surprisingly tame new addition to SW's otherwise outrageous *Coffin Joe* series . . .

Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe, The (1972-Brazil) ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR SUBTITLED HORROR PQ: FAIR D: Jose Mojica Marins. W: Jose Mojica Marins, Walter Stuart, Jofre Soares, Merisol Marins.

A conventional yet interesting addition to the *Coffin Joe* canon, particularly for its attempts to reposition the savagely iconoclastic *Ze' do Caixao* in a more commercially flattering light.

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An *Exorcist* ripoff (see its year of release?), *The Bloody Exorcism* has Coffin Joe creator Jose Mojica Marins visiting a secluded, seemingly normal family in order to write a script. But Marins' labors are drastically disrupted by demonic possessions, spider-infested Christmas trees, and evil witches bent on destroying the entire household.

Despite what's suggested above, *The Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe* isn't an ode to originality; the story strays much too close to the same ground razed by *The Exorcist*. What is fascinating, however, is how far Marins toned down and/or distanced himself from his most famous creation during the course of this picture.

For instance, *The Bloody Exorcism* presents Coffin Joe as a supernatural agent of Satan; somewhere along the way, he's also fathered a daughter. Yet these traits completely invert Joe's previously established *persona*. Films like *At Midnight I Will Take Your Soul* showed CJ to be an ordinary if dangerous mortal who'd rejected both God and the Devil in his fanatical nihilism; *This Night I Will Possess Your Corpse* portrayed Coffin Joe as searching for the perfect woman who'd bear him the perfect son.

So why the radical character switch? Money, apparently. As always. *The Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe* (or *Exorcism Negro*, to give its original Brazilian title), was not only an attempt to cash in on William Friedkin's boxoffice hit, it was also the biggest-budgeted project Marins had worked on at that time. With all that cash at stake, then, is it any wonder Marins had (or wanted) to sand down his previously prickly *Ze' do Caixao* into a smoother, more conventional Coffin Joe?

Still, *The Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe* does include a few skewed flourishes worthy of Marins' earlier, more rebellious work.

For example, the director plays both *Ze do Caixao* and himself, a filmmaker named Jose Mojica Marins. And there's a Pirandello-like moment when Coffin Joe confronts his creator with these (telling?) lines: "You don't believe in me? Don't you have faith in your own work?"

For the most part, though, *The Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe* is a curious and disappointing attempt to drain the venom from *Ze' do Caixao*'s uniquely poisonous personality. Pick up something like *This Night I Will Possess Your Corpse* for a undiluted shot of the real Coffin Joe instead.

Frank Henenlotter's Sexy Shockers From the Vaults

Necromania (1971-USA) ★ ★
COLOR PORN (SOFT CORE)
PQ: GOOD

D: Ed Wood. W: Ric Lutze, Rene Bond, Maria Arnold, Ed Wood.

Those hungry for a new taste of the Ed Wood *oeuvre* will surely scarf up on this soft-core snack, a long-lost Woodie recently unearthed by writer/director Frank Henenlotter. Who tells us that "We found this totally by accident. The print is missing maybe 10 minutes of its original running time, which includes some rumored hard-core footage and the film's credits. But it's unmistakably Wood; that's been verified by Ed's biographer, Rudolph Grey (*Nightmare of Ecstasy*). Besides, no one ever wrote dialogue like this *except* Wood!"

Ultracheap and garish, *Necromania*'s "story" concerns a young couple's experiences at a supernatural sex clinic (where Criswell's coffin shows up!). But the fantasy angle's quite slight; the bulk of this film's consumed by extended nude gropings. Yet there *are* those sprinklings of Wood's characteristically daft dialogue ("Is everything else around here done on such a startling scale?"), and *Necromania* also,

amusingly lurches along from farce to sleaze to transcendental lunacy. Which prompts a question — couldn't the man get even a *porn movie* right?

Featuring an appearance by the ole' Woodmeister himself, as a long-haired Lothario doing the nasty with a mattressful of naked starlets while remaining chastely clothed throughout. *Necromania* is sure to appeal to "broad"-minded Wood cultists; others, however, will find it a rather limp entry in the Woodsian canon.

Which isn't much much of a dis, come to think of it. Not when one considers how minor Ed's "canon" was to begin with . . .

She Mob (1968-USA) ★ ★ 1/2 BW
NUDIE/ROUGHIE/CRIME PQ:
GOOD D: N/A W: Marni Castle,
Adam Clyde, Eve Laurie.

Black and white roughie is a new *Sexy Shockers* title; according to your tastes, you'll either find it lanquid, cheesy, mildly sick, fitfully amusing, or all of the above.

Texas, the late-Sixties. An all-girl gang breaks out of prison.

Bored and horny, they kidnap a rich widow's stud, first for the ransom, then for his sexual services. Enter a lady detective, whose dress constantly exposes her ass.

Try not to laugh.

A capable if somewhat listless indie production, *She Mob* exudes exactly the sort of woozy, other-world atmosphere you'd expect from a cheap Sixties nudie shot in Texas. The cast, however, is another story. While I couldn't decipher the credits for the charmingly bubble-headed actress playing the psychotic, go-go dancing "Twig", it's the memorable Marni Castle — turning in a distinctive dual performance — who scores *She Mob*'s biggest acting honors anyway.

Castle portrays both the kidnapped stud's rich girlfriend and the gal-gang's leader, Big Shim. A leather-clad dyke whose breasts are

capped by the same kind of black rubber torpedos you'd expect to find on the rear bumper of a '61 Cadillac. And Shim steals the show; she's such a sweaty, hard-nosed character you can almost *feel* the excitement Castle had in playing her, especially during Big S.'s more cartoonish moments.

Marni Castle created a genuinely distinctive, heretofore undiscovered Z-movie icon in *She Mob*. Making Big Shim the best reason for watching this otherwise campy curiosity.

Other Nuggets from Something Weird

Blood-O-Rama Shock Show (Various-Variou) ★ ★ ★ COLOR TRAILER COMPILATION/GORE PQ: GOOD D: Various. W: Various.

A really excellent compilation of hardcore gore trailers, equalling if not surpassing the previous champ in this genre, *Mad Ron's Prevues From Hell*. Includes coming attractions for so many seminally moist movies that the palms sweat, the stomach reels... *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*, *Andy Warhol's Dracula*, *Blood Feast*, *Make Them Die Slowly*, *Deranged*, *The Corpse Grinders*, *Basket Case*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Worm Eaters*, *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the S.S.*, *The Wizard of Gore* — the list goes on and fucking on. All sharply transferred, too.

Today, gore movies are a threatened genre. So until the exploitation pendulum swings back again, here's your chance to take a nostalgically bloody romp back down corpuscle lane. *Blood-O-Rama Shock Show* also serves as a handy reminder of how incredibly permissive our pop culture used to be.

Before the age of Aids, Republicanism and the upcoming Millenium, that is.

Invasion of the Neptune Men (1961-

Japan) ★ ★ BW SCIENCE FICTION PQ: GOOD D: Koji Ota. W: Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Kappei Matsumoto, Mitsui Komiya, Shinjiro Ebara.

Six obnoxious Japanese schoolboys and the cape-clad "Space Chief" battle pointy-helmeted Neptune Men in a tacky Japanese superhero saga, serial-style.

This microbudgeted Toei clone of such comparatively lavish Toho invasion flix like *The Mysterians* suffers from an excrutiatingly slow first act. It's also hampered by a cliched script and weirdly inappropriate dubbing. These last gaffes aren't nearly as bad-movie fun as they sound; I've gotten lots more enjoyment from Jap crap like *Prince of Space*. *Invasion* picks up in the middle, though, and its's finale kicks ass, with surprisingly good miniature and explosion fx.

Invasion of the Neptune Men went directly to television in 1964 — it was never released to American theaters (if it had, I suspect most audiences would have fled in disgust). So is there no way to appreciate this thing? Sure; as the second feature film appearance of Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, the revered martial-arts star of such 70's action flix as the *Street Fighter*. The same film Christian Slater's watching when Patricia Arquette picks him up in *True Romance*.

Chiba plays a duel role in *Invasion of the Neptune Men*, as Space Chief and his mild-mannered alter ego, Mr. Tanaba. Which, on top its other bizarro quirks, makes me sorry that the *Neptune Men* didn't premiere in American movie-houses. For if it had, the few hardy souls who sat through the whole thing would have been rewarded with a brand new feeling.

The sensation of their brains moving in their heads.

Or at the very least, the suspicion that someone had dosed their root beers. With 4-man hits of window pane...

Psychedelic Freak-Out Volume 1 (1966-1970-USA) ★ ★ ★ BW/COLOR DOCUMENTARY/TRIP FILM COMPILATION PQ: GOOD D: & W: Various

I may not have dropped since 1973 (too many trips and too much bad acid — y'know?), but lemme tell ya, ten minutes into *this* sucker, I was down on my hands and knees, rummaging under the sink for my old Deadhead waterpipe.

Why? 'Cause this two-hour compendium of clueless antidrug docos and trippy, sexy shorts is more fun than a handful of 'shrooms, or a pocketful of morning glory seeds. Standouts include the percussion-pounding "Acid Dreams", which integrates light shows, found footage and gyrating nudes in a stream-of-consciousness style about 100 zillion times faster than anything on MTV. Also good — the hilarious anti-LSD documentary "To Fly a Giant Bird", whose endlessly repeated, "horrible" hallucination is a white paper chicken!

Psychedelic Freak-Out works equally well as cultural artifact, party tape or chemical enhancer, even if you're on nothing heavier than chamomile tea. Yeah, there may be a few too many shots of naked hippie chicks doing their thing to late-60's rock. What the shit. It's still groovy.

Hey! Don't bogart that bong, dammit!

70's Triple XXX Movie House Trailers, Vols. 1-3 (1970/1982- Various) ★ ★ ★ COLOR HARDCORE PORN TRAILER COMPILATION PQ: GOOD D: & W: Various

Comprehensive three-volume compilation of Seventies hardcore trailers, produced during a time when actual storylines and genuine filmstock were porn's artistic mediums of choice.

Volume 1 charts the first wave of explicitly sexual material to ever hit American theaters, and in-

cludes trailers from ground-breaking pud-pounders like *Copenhagen* 1970. By Volume 3, that heady rush of initial sexual freedom has already begun to ossify into today's adult film industry; still-at-it luminaries like Ron Jeremy and John Leslie are all over this tape. My favorite Volume, though, is #2. This one has a good mix of obscure 16mm features (*Thaw the Frigid Bird*, *The Hedonist Hypnotist*), bigger-budgeted 35mm willywackers (*Felicia*, *Captain Lust*), and a few gay (*Trap and Trick*) and Ed Wood (*The Only House in Town*) titles as well.

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Since I was either managing or projecting at a number of adult theaters during the Seventies, *Triple XXX Movie House Trailers* brought a real lump back to my pants — er, throat. Yet the true worth of this series has nothing to do with nostalgia. Check out the *China Girl* trailer in Volume #3; this 1974 fuckflick features an appearance by none other than Chinese character actor James Hong, who's had key roles in *Blade Runner* and *Big Trouble in Little China*! Proving that Cameron Mitchell and Aldo Ray weren't the only legitimate figures to go slumming in a porn film.

Now, if *Something Weird* would only get around to compiling the real classics. Like *Mona*, *Teenage Fantasies*, or *Sexual Freedom in Denmark*. . . .

Rough Cuts also recommends these other *Something Weird* titles: *Love Camp 7*, *The Sinful Dwarf*, *Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory*, *Awakening of the Beast*, *She Freak*.

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* *

VIDEO SEARCH OF MIAMI

After boiling down *Sinister Cinema* and *Something Weird*'s inventory to a single word, what could possibly summarize *Video Search of Miami*'s? Well, how 'bout "World-Trash"? Ok, that's two words — and fuck you, too. Or at least try VSOM's:

Hong Kong Horrors

Cannibal Mercenary (1983-Thailand/Hong Kong) ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR DUBBED D: Hong Lu Wong. W: Lex Songphon, Sugyid Namcham, Rom Rachan, Uthane

Boon Ying.

Asian mercenaries infiltrate Vietnamese jungles to assassinate drug-running military men, encounter eye-gougings, impalings and flesh-eating army instead. Choppy made-in-Thailand mish-mash is a near-incomprehensible puree of combat/cannibal flix (the minimal storyline isn't explained until 45 minutes in!), but gore-hounds will chow down on the escalating atrocities and extra-moist climax. Dubbed into English; terrific print quality. Never lives up to that killer title, though.

Killer Angels (1989-Hong Kong) ★

★ ★ COLOR SUBTITLED ACTION-CRIME PQ: GOOD D: Lui Jun-Gu. W: Moon Lee, Lau Jia-Hui.

Violent female empowerment fantasy has elite band of undercover woman cops tangling with powerful white slavers. Complications arise when one of the Angels falls hard for a principled hitman, and another realizes that the gang informant she's sworn to protect helped murder her own son. Non-stop action from a top-notch entry in the HK "Girls with Guns" subgenre.

The Rape After (1986-HONG KONG) ★ ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR SUBTITLED HORROR PQ: GOOD D: Ho-Menga. W: Chang Ching-Yu.

Hong Kong exploitation at its most sulfurous.

The Rape After's opening, demon-in-disguise date-rape makes me think this picture may have originally been titled *After the Rape*. Particularly since it's supernatural plot deals with the grisly retribution meted out by an aborted baby on the family that did it in (at one point, a fetus murders the doctor who's performing an autopsy on its dead mother — by tearing through the womb and smothering the man's face in Mom's intestines!).

Whatever. This nihilistic, foreboding, and ultratmospheric horror classic is totally tasteless, of course, yet surprisingly sophisticated. Well-focused, too. The supreme achievement of HK horror director Ho Menga (*Black Magic*, *Revenge of the Zombies*), who assaults the viewer with one unrelievedly morbid, stunningly cinematic set-piece after another.

Absolutely essential viewing. I have seen the face of God — and it looks like *The Rape After!*

Untold Story (1993-Hong Kong) ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR LETTERBOX SUBTITLED CRIME/GORE PQ: FAIR W: Anthony Wong, Danny Lee.

True-life police procedural has psychopathic Macau restaurateur chopping up unfortunates, grinding them into barbecue pork buns, then feeding same to suspicious detectives investigating his case.

What seems like an Asian takeoff on *Sweeney Todd* is actually a queasy amalgam of the most over-the-top scenes from *Dr. Lamb* and *Run and Kill* (although *Untold Story* actually tops *Kill's* notorious "charred kiddie" climax by culminating in the graphic, hard-to-watch butchering of an entire family). And despite the admitted allure of its homicidal excesses, this *Story* suffers from any number of faults. Chief among these is the lack of a strong villain. Anthony Wong's murderous cafe owner is mostly a generic, two-dimensional crazy, notably lacking in the ambiguous complexity which made both *Dr. Lamb's* demented cabbie (wacky Simon Yam) and *Run & Kill's* psychotic gangster (Yam again) such memorably compelling loons. Besides, any picture that so enthusiastically endorses the "right" of the police to torture, drug and harass a suspect — a disturbing trait already apparent in more than one HK crime film, but

rarely as outrageously condoned as here — immediately makes my shit list.

Untold Story is a well-made, occasionally shocking *policier*. But not the other-the-top classic others will inevitably claim it to be.

International Singer Series

VSoM recently unveiled a new line of "International Singer" tapes, featuring Europe, Asia and South America's most high-profile female pop stars. Each cassette contains TV clips, music videos or concert appearances by these artists; what makes them interesting (beyond Madonna's apparently worldwide influence) is the fact that we notoriously xeno-ignorant Americans can now listen to popular music from a few cultures besides our own. Or Australia or the U.K.

Two videos from this new series are:

Mylene Farmer: 10 Music Clips (Various-France) ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR LETTERBOX SUBTITLED ROCK VIDEOS PQ: FAIR D: Laurent Boutonnat. W: Mylene Farmer, Others.

Since 1984, this French diva has been extraordinarily successful in Europe and Japan, racking up any number of consecutive Top Ten hits and platinum albums. Part of this appeal probably derives from Farmer's well-conceived, charismatic *persona*; part Gallic punk, part Gothic waif.

Her *songs*, though, are typical Europop: overproduced and melodically meager, despite their pessimistic lyrics. Yet Mylene's music isn't the primary reason for owning this tape — what is are her exceptionally elaborate rock videos.

In fact, "rock video" is way too limiting a term for these rococo productions. Beginning with "Libertine," a Regency Period miniepic featuring marching armies, exploding cannons and furious

chases on horseback, Farmer's rockvids are actually 10 to 15 minute *movies*, short but stunning films replete with opulent settings, elaborate costuming and sweeping cinematography. Not to mention copious bloodshed and nudity — faces are impaled on bayonets, women are shot in the back, and only Madonna (again) seems as willing as Farmer to so frequently go the full-frontal route.

So buy this one for its images. Believe me, you've never seen such visual excess. Not for a pop star. Not even for Madonna.

Vanessa Paradis: Anthology (France-1992) ★ ★ ★ COLOR SUBTITLED ROCK ANTHOLOGY PQ: Good. D & W: Various.

Definitely the best of the two *International Singer* titles reviewed here, and not just because Paradis is a barely-out-of-her-teens, jailbait-French-Lolita-type, either.

Nope, this girl has *chops*. A strong, confident voice that easily rocks harder than Farmer's, hands down, as she tackles everything from smooth ballads ("Joe Le Taxi") to Lenny Kravitz-produced rockers to kinky duets. As when Paradis accompanies ex-Eurhythmics guru Dave Stewart on an acoustic version of "Walk on the Wild Side".

Vanessa Paradis: Anthology also showcases a wider range of musical venues than the Farmer tape; Paradis performs in concert, in videos, and on French TV. So while it may not offer hard rock, *Vanessa Paradis* definitely delivers an otherwise kaledoscopic series of selections performed in a good variety of settings.

Especially for those viewers who, like me, primarily watch rock videos to listen to their *music*.

Giallos

Killer Must Strike Again (1976-Italy/France) ★ ★ ★ COLOR

DUBBED (in English) / SUBTITLED (in Spanish - !) GIALLO PQ: GOOD. D: Luigi Cozzi. W: George Hinton, Michel Antoine, Christine Galbo, Femi Benussi, Alessio Orano.

I know, I know: the phrase "a good Luigi Cozzi picture" seems a outrageous oxymoron. But this early effort from the director of such later dreck as *Hercules* and *Starcrash* is a surprisingly accomplished, unexpectedly riveting thriller.

Story begins like *Dial M. For Murder*, with greedy husband Hinton blackmailing the supremely creepy, skull-faced Antoine into murdering Hinton's wealthy wife. But when the car containing her corpse is stolen by a joy-riding couple, Cozzi highballs his plot into pure giallo country, with offbeat results.

Twisty, well-shot and absorbing, *Killer Must Strike Again* also features an inventive, contextually challenging montage sequence. Yes, *montage . . . from Luigi Cozzi!* Who intercuts between an upsetting rape and a lascivious seduction to truly weird effect.

Anyway, *Killer* comes as a shock, especially considering Cozzi's bargain-basement rep. Video Search of Miami is to be commended for unearthing this fine thriller; it's one of the year's top (re) discoveries.

Japan

Skull Soldier: Vengeance For the Slain Beauty (1993-Japan) ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR LETTERBOX SUBTITLED SUPERHERO/ACTION PQ: FAIR D: Shouki Kyouhon. W: Shouki Kyouhon, Kenji Asashi, Mi-mari Hamada.

Peculiar superhero noir details violent vendetta of The Skull Soldier, an ordinary man transformed via "bone-marrow hormones" into unstoppable crimefighter, as he blasts his way towards a showdown with the

equally superpowered nutcase who murdered his sister.

This is one of those Japanese-guys-in-a-cybersuit-suit thingies, that prolific Nipponese subgenre which had such a strong influence on the *RoboCop* films (particularly *Robo 3*). Most of it's fairly standard stuff - long stretches of earnest tedium punctuated by occasional bursts of beautifully choreographed mayhem or inexplicable weirdness - but the stylishly designed, gunmetal grey, bone-faced Skull Soldier suit is pretty cool, as is the fact that our hero's half-crazy from all those hormone injections (the villain's *totally* 'round the bend).

Cooler of all, though, is Skull Soldier's loyal butler, Gacha. A mute manservant dressed in white gloves, black tux and top hat. Whose grotesquely exaggerated nose and chin make his profile resemble a pink crescent moon. Despite his ugliness, Gacha's easily the most elegant and arresting sidekick I've seen in years. Trust me; he makes the picture.

Still, *The Skull Soldier* isn't kinetic or inspired enough to be an unqualified success. Although it scores *way* up there on the wacky meter.

This also looks to be part of a series; any more *Skull Soldiers* out there? I want more Gacha!

★ ★ ★ *Rough Cuts* also recommends these other VSoM titles:

Mystics in Bali, Tragic Ceremony at Villa Alexander, The House With Windows That Laugh, Cota de Caza and Pyro.

* *

THE CRITERION COLLECTION

Robinson Crusoe On Mars (1963-USA) ★ ★ ★ COLOR LETTERBOX CAV SUPPLEMENTS

SCIENCE FICTION PQ: EXCELLENT D: Byron Haskin. W: Paul Mantee, Adam West, Vic Lundin, and Mona the Wolly Monkey.

One of the most highly regarded, non-exploitative SF films of the Sixties is given the high-gloss Criterion treatment, in a bonus-laden, two-disc CAV set.

Story (which stresses "authentic scientific fact", or at least the authentic scientific facts of 30 years ago), is a clever futuristic reworking of Daniel Dafoe's survival classic. An American astronaut (Paul Mantee) is mapping Mars' gravity from an overhead orbit. When he's forced to crashland on that planet, he then must confront a lack of oxygen, a search for food, and his own loneliness — tasks complicated by the arrival of an alien Man Friday.

Robinson Crusoe on Mars is a realistic, well-acted sleeper that originally seemed aimed at bright teenagers (though adults will like it too). Yet despite years of glowing reviews, it *still* hasn't been transferred to videotape. A situation making Criterion's gorgeous wide-screen version that much easier to recommend.

Once again may the discerning SF cineaste savor Byron (*War of the Worlds*) Haskin's naturalistic direction, and his impressive use of formidable Death Valley locations. Once again can budding composers luxuriate in Nathan Van Cleave's majestic score (that theme!), or applaud Mantee's nicely shaded portrait of a believable NASA professional. And once again may the enraptured owner thrill to *Robinson Crusoe's* discovery of those strange, hallucinogenic, alien water-sausages — still the most convincing extraterrestrial plant ever rendered for the screen.

Obviously, I love this picture. Have for quite some time, in fact, ever since I first saw it at the Kalayaan Theater on the Subic Bay Naval Station in 1964. Which is why I'm so excited about Crite-

tion's fabulous package; even without their stunning transfer, the supplements alone would be enough to have me doing hand-springs.

Supplemental material includes *Crusoe's* original widescreen trailer, excerpts from Ib Melchoir's illustrated screenplay, *Crusoe* production stills & art department sketches (from the collection of Robert Skotak, *Aliens'* Oscar-winning special effects artist), and audio commentaries by costar Vic Lundin (*Crusoe's* man Friday)/Paul Mantee (an actor I always thought would go on to something better, instead of goofy schlock like *The Manitou*). Heretofore unknown trivia include the fact that giant insects and monster centipedes were cut from Melchoir's script, at Haskin's insistence (the director wanted realism). A further bonus involves this disc's rock-steady CAV frames: if you pause the footage showing Mantee's spacecraft, you'll discover that it's *not* an animated effect, as I've always thought, but a *three-dimensional model*. Postproduction skip-printing, used to convey greater velocity for this craft, apparently fooled the spectator's eye into thinking the ship was a cartoon as well.

In any event, it's not often that such a relatively obscure offering gets such deluxe treatment. Criterion's to be lauded for inching out on the fiscal limb for this one. Very highly recommended.

★ ★ ★ *Rough Cuts* also recommends these other *Criterion* titles:

Peeping Tom, Salo, Polyester, Menace II Society, Beauty & the Beast (J. Cocteau version).

* *

OTHER LASERDISCS

Malice (1993-USA) ★ ★ ★
COLOR LETTERBOXED MYS-

TERY PQ: GOOD IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT D: Harold Becker. W: Bill Pullman, Nicole Kidman, Alec Baldwin, Bebe Neuwirth.

Did the mainstream hordes of copycat critic-weasals who panned this entertaining, old-fashioned mystery last summer ever really *see* the damned thing? Methinks not; a tricky, three-tiered narrative (involving a serial rapist, an arrogant surgeon, and a happily married couple) is only one of the pleasures of this unheralded but satisfying suspenser. Solid performances all round, with Anne Bancroft's drunken cameo a particular standout. Biggest liabilities are an easy-to-guess twist ending (I did, anyway), and a slightly sluggish opening. Hang in there, though — this one's a sleeper.

Romper Stomper (1992-Australia) ★ ★ ★
★ ★ COLOR DRAMA PQ: GOOD IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT D: Geoffrey Wright. W: Russell Crowe, Daniel Pollock, Jacqueline McKenzie, Alex Scott.

One of 1992's best films was unceremoniously dumped into arthouses last year when it deserved and would have done much better in mainstream theaters. How can I be sure? 'Cause *Romper Stomper* melded the crackling chase-structure of Walter Hill's *The Warriors* with the ambiguous teen violence of Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, then tossed in the fuck-you rebelliousness of P. Spheris' *Suburbia*.

So why's so little been written about this harrowing, well-made motion picture? Easy answer, that — because it deals with skinheads. Worse, *Romper Stomper* supposedly portrays them in a positive light. Two qualities spelling D-E-A-T-H in today's PC-oriented marketplace.

Well, this uncompromising character study of a Melbourne-based skin gang and the widening rift between two of its members (a split caused by an unlikely romantic triangle), may indeed exhibit a surprising, nay, a *questionable* amount of sympathy for its thug-gish protagonists. But understanding isn't endorsement, you morons.

Not when talented first-time writer/director Geoffrey Wright is more interested in what these Nazi-worshipping punks *are* than in what they *do*. Besides, subtle but implicit moral lessons are everywhere. One example is the film's most frightening sequence, as the skins eventually get their violence

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thrown back into their faces by the same Vietnamese immigrants they've been stomping on throughout. More to the point, the gang's surrogate-family aspects, which is why most disaffected kids get caught up in this foolish shit anyway, finally, messily implodes under the combined pressures of their dead-end environments and pointless lifestyles.

So ignore the propaganda and catch this one. It certainly isn't an easy picture, nor a pretty one. But *Romper Stomper* combines finely textured performances (Russell Crowe as Hondo, the gang's leader, is singularly good), with tight direction and a harrowing climax. All in a tense, powerful package labeled "Best of Hardball Cinema".

Footnote: *Stomper* boasts a blistering soundtrack too. Just don't listen to the lyrics too closely; most of the songs were penned by musically exciting, politically viru-

lent skinhead bands.

* *

ANIME ACTION

Though I never make a big deal of it, I've long been a fan of Japanese animation. Where else can you find a supposed form of children's art whose storylines, characters and themes embrace such sophisticated and/or adult concerns? Not in the (mostly) horrendous cartoon crap coming out of this country.

Providentially, the L.A.-based *Streamline Pictures* has been regularly pumping out a steady flow of quality Japanese *anime* for some years now, both to theaters and home video. Here are a few new releases from that company you should know about:

Crying Freeman Chapter One: Portrait of A Killer (1988-Japan) ★ ★
★ COLOR DUBBED ANIME-CRIME-SEX PQ: GOOD D: Daisuke Nishio (English language version directed by Carl Macek). With the Voices of: Steve Bulen, Edie Mirman, Michael McConnochie.

A brainwashed, tattooed assassin for the Chinese Mafia — who cries after every hit — is ordered to eliminate the sole female witness to a gangland murder. But after this "Crying Freeman" falls in love with his intended victim, treacherous policemen and vengeful mobsters earmark the pair for death.

A bloody soft-core thriller that's actually only the first chapter (running time: 51 minutes) of a six-part series, *Crying Freeman* is based on a Japanese *manga* (comic book) originally written by Kazuo Koike, author of the internationally famous *Lone Wolf and Cub*. And like the popular *Wolf*, *Crying Free-*

man is an exotic, erotic action/adventure containing scenes of extreme violence and sex. It's also moody, measured without being slow, and recommended.

Not as stylish or well-animated as *Wicked City*, though; *Freeman's* relatively stripped-down, functional art has a TV-look about it. However, *Crying Freeman* can be proud of its good English dubbing, an appreciated *Streamline* standard. Look for more chapters of this melancholy saga soon.

Eight Man After Volume One: City in Fear (1993-Japan) ★ ★ 1/2 COLOR DUBBED ANIME-SUPERHERO-CRIME PQ: GOOD D: Sumiyoshi Furakawa (English language version directed by Carl Macek). With the Voices of: Mari Devon, Steve Bulen, Mike Reynolds.

Like *Crying Freeman*, this 30-minute *8 Man* tape is routinely animated, as well as being the first chapter of an ongoing story. Plot concerns a *Blade Runner*-ish city terrorized by drug-crazed "cyber junkies", whose bodies have been surgically modified to accept heavy-duty firepower. Enter "8 Man", an equally altered but far more powerful crimefighter. Who's actually a murdered private detective.

Based on a successful 1960's Japanese comic book/animation hero created by Kazumasa Hirai and Jiro Kuwata, *8 Man After* features the usual requisite of gory killings and splatery homicides. But the necessity of setting up the story eats too much into an already short running time. Making *8 Man* not as good as *Crying Freeman* or *Wicked City*. Further episodes might change that opinion, though.

Wicked City (1987-Japan) ★ ★ ★ COLOR DUBBED ANIME-HORROR-SEX PQ: GOOD D: Yoshiaki

Kawajiri (English language version directed by Carl Macek). With the Voices of: Greg Snegoff, Mike Reynolds, Gaye Kruger, Edie Mirman.

One of the most popular bootlegged Japanese *animés* of the past seven years (under the title *Supernatural Beastie City*) is finally available in an authorized, uncut, English language version. And it's a keeper.

In order to protect humanity from the bizarre inhabitants of a parallel dimension named "The Black World," Earth leaders have struck a non-aggression pact with these creatures. But when two secret agents — one human, one not — are assigned to protect the architect of the latest treaty, all three are besieged by shape-shifting radicals who'll do anything to disrupt that peace.

Wicked City was adapted as an effects-heavy live action Hong Kong film in 1992 by producer Tsui Hark. And while it's certainly entertaining, the live-action *City* was a bit *too* effects-oriented to successfully integrate its visuals and its plot. Not so with the original version; director Yoshiaki Kawajiri's has bolstered his *City* with more fully-rounded characters, a *noir*-like romance, and kinkier sex sequences.

The animated *City* is also a paranoid surrealist's hallucinatory vision of contemporary urban angst. Casual bar pickups transform into half-naked spiderwomen (with gnashing, fang-filled vaginas), lurking streetcorner thugs are actually murderous tentacled beasts. This is violent, outrageous stuff, as well as a searing eye-opener for those who think *Speed Racer* the pinnacle of Japanese cartoon art.

Impressively animated, with a sleek, glittering style punctuated by numerous multiplane shots. Need I point out it's intended for adults? Comes packaged with its theatrical trailer, plus two coming

attractions; *The Professional: Golgo 13* and *Fist of the North Star*.

★ ★ *Rough Cuts* also recommends these other *Streamline* titles:

Robot Carnival, *Akira*, *Fist of the North Star* and *Golgo 13*.

* *

B-MOVIE BOOKSHELF

McFarland & Company — you know, the North Carolina publisher who eschews dustjackets in favor of library-bound, primary-color book covers instead — continues to release such a consistent flow of noteworthy product I could have devoted this entire column to its latest releases, and still be strapped for space.

Ergo, we'll limit our focus to two recent books. Both can be ordered directly from the publisher by writing:

McFARLAND & COMPANY, INC.
P.O. BOX 611
JEFFERSON NC 28640
(910) 246-4660

Japanese Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films, by Stuart Galbraith IV. McFarland & Co. 1994. List Price - \$45.00.

The subheading for this important, informative overview is "A Critical Analysis of 103 Features Released in the United States, 1950-1992." But lurking behind that nondescript tagline is a major (and long overdue) publishing event — the first book-length English-language study of that often garish, sometimes silly, but greatly beloved Asian subgenre, the Japanese monster movie.

And yes, it's a serious examination of same. Written with a fan's enthusiasm, a scholar's eye and a researcher's obsessiveness. Even if Galbraith has limited his survey to only those Japanese science fiction, fantasy and horror titles which were released to

American television or theatres.

However, despite his narrow focus, Galbraith hasn't limited himself to chapters on Gamera, Godzilla, or Mothra (whose original Japanese title: *Mosura*). Instead, he opens with Kurosawa's masterful *Rashomon* (1950) and then evidences a critical reach spanning everything from Kaneto Shindo's sensual *Onibaba* to Kinji Fukasaku's braindead *Message From Space*. Galbraith then wraps up his study of four decades worth of Nipponese fantasy with 1992's *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, an example of Japan's current *kaiju eiga* (or "monster film") revival.

Of course, the obvious question prompted by all this work is, "Are Japanese genre films worth the trouble?" The answer is — yes. Absolutely. For beyond the charming boundaries of child-oriented monster rallies like *Destroy All Monsters*, behind no-budget lunacies like *Invasion of the Neptune Men*, lies an entire realm of woefully uncharted Japanese subgenres. Like end-of-the-world films (*The Last War*, 1961). Alien invader extravaganzas (*Battle in Outer Space*, 1959). Supernatural horrors (*The Ghost of Yotsuya*, 1959). Not to mention a handful of good Toho monster films like the original *Godzilla* (1954).

Galbraith, then, is to be thanked for compiling this sometimes fannish but always fair motherlode of information. As for its structure, *Japanese Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films* closely resembles Bill Warren's equally earthshaking *Keep Watching the Skies!*. Each of JSF, F & HF's 103 films is given its own well-written chapter along with a plot synopsis, critique, production history, personal anecdote, review quotes and a comparison between its U.S. and Japanese versions (most of which are now available on letterboxed Japanese laserdiscs, and should always take priority over their redited, rescored, and pan-n'-

scanned American brethren). Galbraith's book then concludes with a comprehensive index and filmography.

The downside? Fans of Japanese animation will be disappointed, since Galbraith has virtually ignored that equally unique genre. However, as the author sensibly puts it, *anime* titles are so "different and numerous... as to require a book of their own." The book's tone also leans a bit too heavily on the nostalgic; I always prefer hard facts over a rapturous recounting of the first time an author stumbled across *Destroy All Monsters* playing on TV. Finally, there are no illustrations here. None. A lack of pictures that's supposedly the result of some ominous (and incomprehensible!) legal rumblings from the Toho Studio lawyer-weasels, who've been throwing their litigious weight around lately.

These caveats aside, *Japanese SF, F & HF* is an essential homage to the retina-searing delights seen by more 50's, 60's & 70's American cinekids than any other foreign films of their period. It's also a quintessential potato-chip book; no matter how many times you open it to digest a single review, you'll never be able to eat just one.

Spaghetti Westerns, the Good, the Bad & the Violent: 558 Eurowesterns & Their Personnel, 1961-1977, by Thomas Weisser. MacFarland & Co. 1992. List Price - \$45.00

Larger in scope than Weisser's recent but equally valuable *Asian Trash Cinema: The Book* (which has just gone into a second printing; write VSoM for more details), *Spaghetti Westerns* stockpiles nearly 600 capsule comments on just as many Eurowesterns. And in its own way, this is as indispensable a volume as Galbraith's *Japanese SF, F & HF*; both books break fertile, mostly untilled cinematic ground.

Taking a decidedly more mid-

dle-brow approach, than, say, Christopher Frayling's academic survey of the same subject (*Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans From Karl May To Sergio Leone*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), the beauty of Weisser's book lies in its unadulterated enthusiasm; here's an author who's obviously appreciative of the jaw-dropping violence, baroque visual sensibilities, and off-the-wall narratives that typify the pasta cowboy films. Making Weisser's book the perfect choice for those who'd rather watch *Django the Bastard* than *Ride the High Country* (I, of course, would watch both!).

Spaghetti Westerns includes 558 short sections examining various Eurowesterns from France, Spain and Germany (not just Italy). It also provides filmographies of key personnel — actors, directors, musical composers, scriptwriters, cinematographers — a Top Ten list, a roundup of American-made spaghetti westerns, and the lowdown on the genre's most pathetic offerings.

My one complaint is that *Spaghetti Westerns* notably lacks the behind-the-scenes production details and semi-academic inquiries Galbraith included in his own *Japanese Science-Fiction Films*. Then again, such material probably would have doubled Weisser's book. However, one does hope that Tom will someday be able to address these issues in a revised, expanded edition.

Otherwise, this author's to be commended for a great labor of love; *Spaghetti Westerns* is encyclopedic, enthusiastic stuff.

★ ★ *Rough Cuts* also recommends these other McFarland titles:

Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing and Horror Cinema (by Mark A. Miller), *Universal Horrors: The Studio's Classic Films 1931-1946* (Michael Brunas, John Brunas, Tom Weaver), *Horror Film Directors*

* *

RECOMMENDED FANZINES

As it's been a year since the last appearance of my "Recommended Filmnzines" list (which, if I remember correctly, stopped with *The Last Prom*), let's dispense with any attempts at continuity and get right down to two more superior publications well worth your bucks.

Cult Movies (6201 Sunset Blvd., Suite 152, Hollywood CA 90028).

When *Cult Movies* first appeared, I more or less dismissed it as a hipper (if weaker) version of *Filmfax*. But with Issue #10 arrives ample evidence that this getting-better-all-the-time publication has not only grown slicker and meatier, it's also found its own identity.

Cult Movies editor Michael Coptner has now pulled off the difficult task of creating a magazine that successfully integrates its love for yesterday's B-movies with an equally rapt fascination for today's stright-to-video schlock. Contents typically include filmmaker interviews (Frank Henclotter), oldies retrospectives (*Dark Eyes of London*) career overviews (composer Akira Ifukube), guest-star articles (Johnny Legend), and longish movie/video review sections.

One of the better examples of cult film criticism, rock 'n roll style. Check it out.

Psychotronic Video (3309 RT. 97, Narrowsburg NY, 12764-6126. 914-252-6803)

Not, strictly speaking, a horror, sf or fantasy zine, since editor Michael Weldon regularly covers action/adventure, nudie, rock n' roll, cult, drive-in and grindhouse hits too. But is there anyone familiar with exploitation cinema who

doesn't buy *Psychotronic Video*?

An offshoot of Weldon's popular trade paperback THE PSYCHOTRONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM (published by Ballantine; an updated edition is "due real soon now"), this essential, pioneering fanzine covers more fascinating virgin territory than any other player on the field. Each issue contains terrific articles, well-researched interviews and one-of-a-kind photographs; subjects include psychotronic phenomena like director Radley Metzger, "Christopher Plummer Canadian Drug Movies", *Teenagers from Outer Space*, "Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow" and The Rivingtons. *Psychotronic's* lengthy video review sections, which unearths dozens of obscure titles, is especially impressive. As is "Never To Be Forgotten", an invaluable if distressing obituary column. Expect to see Cameron Mitchell (who died July 6, 1994 at his Pacific Palisades home of lung

cancer) and Savannah (the buxom-blond porn queen who shot herself in the head on July 11, after breaking her nose in a car crash), in "Never to be Forgotten" soon.

PSYCHOTRONIC VIDEO is published four times a year — and you should shrug off any criticism aimed at the level of Weldon's writing. He simply has his own style, that's all. Perfectly pitched to the throw-away nature of the genres he loves. So there.

Anyway, if you're new to this field, *Psychotronic Video* should be your first 'zine of choice. It's the cutting edge

of exploitation archaeology.

★ ★ *Rough Cuts* also recommends these other magazines titles:

Video Watchdog Special Edition #1: 1994, *Little Shoppe of Horrors #12*, *Monster! International*, *Samhain*, *Shock Cinema*, *ScarlettStreet*.

* *

It's a wrap.

Next issue we'll return to the "Video Void", our in-depth survey of overlooked and underated tapes. The target? Curtis Hanson's *Aroused*.

And if anyone's got any information on the O.J. Simpson case, don't forget that toll-free number; 1-800-322-3622. Or the \$500,000 reward.

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SHADOW GAMES

A NOVEL EXCERPT BY
ED GORMAN

"Lilly Carlyle would eat her young if she thought they tasted good enough."

—Unnamed producer

I

In Beverly Hills that September, the new exercise guru was a lithe Korean chap who taught that you could *will* weight and cellulite away. Of course, he also put you on a diet of 834 calories a day, just in case the willing part didn't work so well. But he wore a version of a *dobro*, one of those white, belted jobs that Tae Kwon Do instructors favoured, so he must have known what he was doing, right?

Anyway, the deal was this: you'd go into a small, dark room that was lit from above only by a small, rose light. In the background, soft Korean music played (or what the Korean chap said was Korean music; actually, it sounded a lot like the 101 Strings Playing Ravi Shankar's Greatest Hits); and then the Korean chap, sitting in the exact centre of the floor, with all the overweight ladies around him, would start reciting long lists of presumably Korean phrases, and the overweight ladies would do their best to repeat them.

This went on for nearly half an hour, at which point the Korean chap stood and went around to each of them and touched his sharp, damp thumb to their foreheads, and said a prayer that they should shed their excess pounds. Again, he spoke what was presumably Korean, though Georgia Feldstein, a wise-ass matron Lilly liked a lot, said that sometimes the man's Korean sounded like some of the things Shemp and Mo muttered to each other in the course of a "Three Stooges" two-reeler.

The cost for all this was three hundred and fifty dollars a week and, in the first month, Lilly Carlyle lost not a single pound. She had, as always, drawn up a list of "substitutes" for the things the Korean chap had recommended for his 834-calorie diet.

And they were the usual substitutes, too: cake for bran bread; rich ice cream for Jell-O; and spare ribs for

tuna fish. So what were a few more cency, teensy calories, anyway?

The sessions with the Korean chap ran five mornings a week, which put Lilly in her office at International Talent Management just before eleven. By that time of day, she was sure to have received at least six "really urgent" phone messages from the various actors, writers and directors she represented. So what else was new?

II

It was a typical Los Angeles autumn morning. Raining like a mother.

The mayor was asking people not to hate him just because he was black. (They didn't; they hated him for many other reasons.) And there had been another freeway shooting last night. This time, thank God, nobody actually killed, just maimed a little. And a Lakers' cheerleader tearfully told KTLA-TV viewers that her decision to become a nun was not a cheap publicity gimmick just because her agent had dropped her, "the greasy little bastard."

Lilly drove her twenty-year-old, wire-wheeled Jag from the Korean chap's to the office and arrived just in time to wave goodbye to International's lone superstar, a silver-haired man Lilly had tried to sleep with one drunken night after the Oscars, only to have him turn her down.

Ricardo, the male secretary who really hated Lilly and vice-versa, lifted his azure gaze and said, sweetly, "How's the diet going, Lilly?" even though he could plainly see that, despite her very chic linen suit, she was still fifty pounds overweight.

But she was too single-minded this morning to let the little bitch set her off. She went directly to her office and closed the door.

After she had returned all the "really urgent" messages (only one out of six was really urgent, a very decent director of hers who was sweating out an AIDS test and just wanted a few kind words, which she gave him) and read the usual memos From Above urging all six International agents to try harder for big names,

she poured herself a cup of coffee and walked over to the window.

The size and condition of her office bespoke Suzie O'Malley's (aka Lilly Carlyle—a name she'd taken from a bodice ripper paperback) time in Hollywood.

While the carpet was pretty good, the furnishings were dated and, if one looked closely, scuffed. The burnt orange couch, for instance, was missing a button which she'd had to cover with a burnt orange throw pillow that did not exactly match the couch itself. There was a tiny cigarette hole in the leather-like armchair that sat next to the wood-like bookcase in which Lilly kept neat stacks of the scripts she was currently schlepping around town.

Lilly hadn't sold a script in two years.

The office smelled of something that had been too long deprived of fresh air, a musty smell. Because, Lilly supposed, it was something of a musty agency—or that was its reputation, anyway. International had only one mega-star, and him they clung to with all the fervour and force possible. Nobody in the business could figure out why the guy stayed with Wade Preston and Lilly Carlyle.

Mostly, International dealt with TV stars, of the sitcom and car chase fodder variety. They'd be big three, four seasons on a hit show, and they'd get lots and lots of press (good press, if Lilly was doing her job), and then the series would fold and go into syndication and then the stars would go into a new sitcom or car chase series and it wouldn't do very well at all. And two seasons later you could catch said stars sitting inside a box and having dimpled John Davidson bounce would-be funny lines off them. That was the arc: nobody to star to nobody. Usually the round trip took seven, eight years. Hey, pal, do you know the way to San Jose?

With one exception.

Cobey Daniels.

Cobey hadn't just been big, he'd been super-big, and if he hadn't gotten in trouble with that fourteen-year-old chick in Florida—

Lilly'd had to work her considerable ass off to keep him out of the slam. As was only proper. Wade Preston, who was in love with Lilly and at least once a week asked her to marry him, had sold Lilly a sizable share of the agency several years ago.

She'd managed to manoeuvre Cobey into a mental hospital. The usual bit, really: perils-of-teenage-stardom, stress, fatigue, hadn't-really-been-going-to-hurt-the-girl.

The judge had gone along. God bless him.

Now, recalling all this, Lilly looked down on Sunset Boulevard.

How romantic, that name. Sunset Boulevard. She'd come to Hollywood as Suzie O'Malley from a small Ohio town, the same plot setup all those hack

musical-comedy writers used in the thirties and forties and fifties.

She hadn't been a happy girl. She'd been cursed with a gorgeous face sitting atop a seriously overweight body and now she wasn't a happy woman. Twice married, twice divorced. Three abortions. She'd even tried sex with another woman once, an actress who seemed to truly believe that she was in some kind of supernatural contact with Garbo, but that hadn't done it at all. Lilly liked men; or some men, anyway.

Now she stood looking down at the wrong end of Sunset (the really successful agencies were elsewhere) on a chill, gray, rainy day, and she thought of Cobey.

She had talked to him many times lately. She had plans for him again.

He'd blown it the first time, but she was going to make certain he didn't blow it the second time.

God, she'd fought so hard for him. All those years, ever since he was a six-year-old boy.

She sighed, turning away from the window.

It was time to write the letter, time to set it all in motion again.

She went over to her computer terminal, flipped on the green-glowing machine, and waited for the small electronic dot to explode in the middle of her screen.

Then she set to work.

Doctor Robert Reeves
Chief Psychiatrist
Menlow Park Hospital
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Doctor Reeves,

When we spoke a year ago, you said you felt that if everything went well in the next twelve months, Cobey would be released this fall.

I've seen Cobey four times in the past year and I speak to him at least once a week on the phone. I can honestly say he looks and sounds like the old Cobey. I believe he's ready for release and I hope you agree with me.

I should add a cautionary note here. The Hollywood press—including the tabloids—has been eagerly awaiting his release. There's nothing they love more than finding a new angle on an old scandal. They'll bring it all up again, too—how Cobey was the most beloved teenage star of the early eighties, and what happened that day at the Florida shopping mall. Not to mention several other incidents in which he was involved.

In light of this, I'm asking you to keep his release a secret. I have employed a Hollywood private investigative firm whose people are also trained bodyguards. A man named William Puckett will be meeting with you and arranging for Cobey's final release. He

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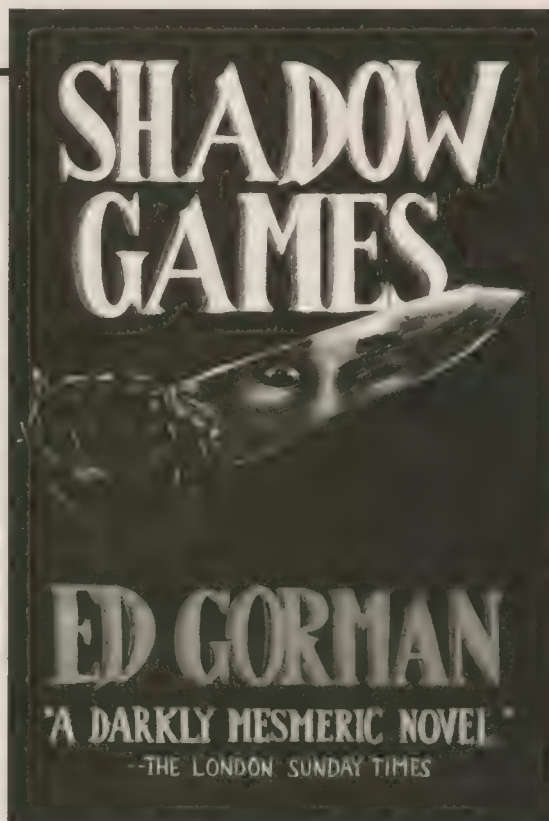
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will fly with Cobey back to Los Angeles, at which point I will take over. I have already contacted a psychiatrist here so that Cobey can begin seeing him at once, three times a week.

I appreciate your cooperation in this matter and if you have any questions, please contact me. Cobey's release is my chief concern in life because he is the son I never had...

Sincerely,

Lilly Carlyle

III

Family Life had once taped one of those "serious" episodes cast with one eye on an Emmy and one eye on even greater ratings.

In this episode, Cobey's nineteen-year-old sister had a breakdown and was sent to a mental hospital.

This was the first time Cobey had ever heard of electric-shock treatments, of how they strapped you down and zapped your brain with several thousand volts of electricity. Supposedly, the shock would bring you out of your deep depression.

Cobey was seventeen at the time of the episode. For days he went around thinking of electric-shock as something like Frankenstein's monster, jagged blue bolts of electricity crisscrossing the air above the skull, the entire body convulsing. He'd also been told that in the early days of electric-shock the convulsions had been so severe that some people actually broke arms and legs; and a few even swallowed their tongues and strangled to death.

And two days before his twenty-first birthday, early in his second year at Menlow Park Hospital, Cobey received his first electric-shock treatment, which some of the patients called "riding the lightning."

The odd thing was, it wasn't so bad, not really. Cobey went into this small, white room adjacent to the big, white operating room and he read magazines and he chatted with the other patients awaiting treatments and then a slender, very pretty nurse came into the room and called Cobey's name and then led him very sweetly into an anteroom where he was given a white hospital gown and told to lie down on a gurney. Then the same very pretty nurse, talking and smiling all the time, strapped Cobey down and pushed him into the operating room.

Seen from the gurney, the room was white and vast. It smelled of various tart medicines and it was so cold that Cobey could feel goose bumps all over his arms and legs.

Everything, from Cobey's perspective, was upside

down, of course.

A doctor and three nurses peered down at him, their heads forming a semicircle.

The nurses were pretty. The doctor had wide, hairy nostrils.

"Do you know what sodium pentathol is?" the doctor asked. He had a beard and he was young and he sort of looked like a hippie.

"Truth serum?" Cobey said.

The doctor smiled. "Well, that's its popular name. We call it sodium pentathol. Nurse Irene is going to give you an injection of it. All you need to do is start counting backwards from one hundred. You'll never reach ninety-six."

Cobey thought that was highly unlikely. Who couldn't count backwards from one hundred to ninety-six?

He couldn't.

He reached ninety-seven and the universe exploded. Freezing blackness—the darkness between the stars could be no colder or vaster—overwhelmed him and he ceased, at least as far as he knew, to exist.

Extinction.

He was next aware of struggling to open his eyes. Brightness pushed against his lids and a human voice rumbled something not quite understandable.

His eyes came open. He was in a sunny little room in Menlow Park Hospital. A beefy orderly in skintight white T-shirt and pants was talking to him.

There were various framed photographs that Lilly had put up on his first day here. "I want the staff to know you're somebody special, and I want you to know it, too," she'd said. The photos showed Cobey with different celebrities, including President Reagan, Michael Jackson and Morgan Fairchild. The photos tried hard to make people think that Cobey and these people were good friends.

"How you feelin', Cobey?"

When he'd first come to Menlow Park, he'd suffered what Dr. Reeves had called hysterical amnesia. He couldn't remember much, sometimes not even his own name. Following electric-shock, he'd felt pretty much the same way.

"I ... uh ... feel all right, I guess."

"You did good, Cobey. Real good."

"Gosh, thanks."

Cobey then started the difficult task of reconstructing the past few hours. Breakfast. Going downstairs in an elevator. A small, white room—counting backwards—and now ...

"Cobey?" Cobey said. "That's my name?"

The man grinned. "Right. Cobey." Then he kind of punched Cobey playfully on the arm.

In all, Cobey had ten electric-shock treatments. It was felt by the staff that his spirits had improved at least slightly, and it was whispered, by the patients, that

maybe the young TV star wasn't as aloof as they'd once thought, that maybe he'd just been depressed. God, if any of them had gone through what Cobey had in the back of that shopping mall ... well, who wouldn't be depressed?

IV

On the morning he received Lilly Carlyle's letter, Dr. Robert Reeves interviewed four staffers about Cobey's recent behaviour. Satisfied that the young man was indeed doing well, Reeves walked the hospital grounds looking for Cobey.

He found him on the tennis courts, playing doubles with an arsonist (his partner), a paedophile (who was also an eminent minister), and a particularly vile wife-torturer (the man's millions having kept him from a real prison).

Reeves liked to hear the *thwack* of the ball as it went back and forth across the net, the sound echoing off the green bluffs surrounding the red brick hospital which most people thought resembled a small college campus. He liked to hear patients having fun.

Between matches, Reeves went up and asked if he could speak with Cobey. Cobey said sure.

"Well, it's lunch time," Reeves said. "How about walking over the cafeteria with me?"

V

"You know you're up for review, right, Cobey?"

"Yessir."

They walked along. Cobey smiled when he saw a plump little squirrel toting a huge acorn along the edge

of the sidewalk. As they approached the main building, Cobey could smell lunch. The food here was great. He felt a wonderful sense of belonging; and then he thought, ruefully, *I really must be crazy if I want a mental hospital as my alma mater.*

"The board pretty much acts on what I say," Reeves said. He was a tall man and, in his white medical jacket, he seemed even taller. He was bald and the top of his head looked as if he Simonized it every few days.

"Yessir," Cobey said, sounding tentative. He had a hunch where this was going but he was afraid to hope that ...

"I'm going to recommend that you be released to the custody of Lilly," Dr. Reeves said.

And then he stopped and put his hand out and Cobey shook it and thought, oh, hell, and threw his arms around Dr. Reeves, his head reaching the middle of the medical man's chest.

"I'm going home!" Cobey said. "I'm going home!"

"Yes, you are," Dr. Reeves said. "And a man named Puckett is going to take you there."

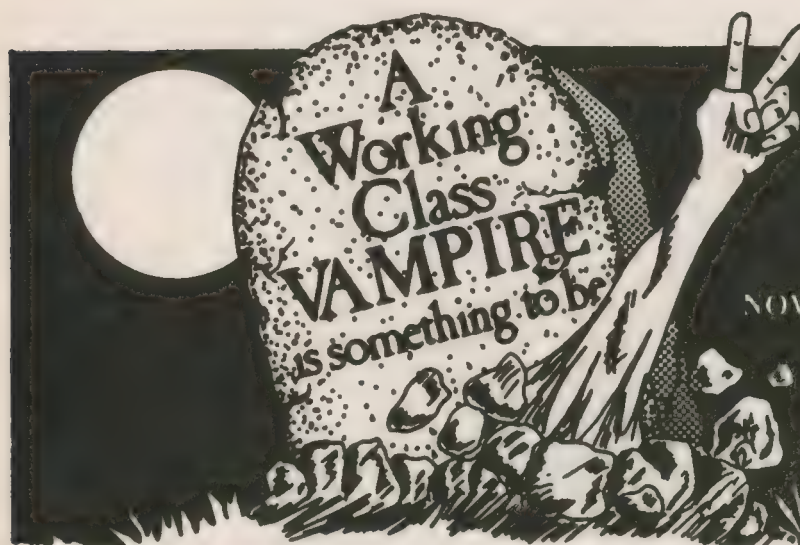
Lunch that day was spaghetti, a particular favourite of Cobey's.

He sat across the table from Dr. Reeves and when Reeves wasn't smiling and talking with his mouth full, Cobey was.

Warm autumn sunshine slanted through the windows, touching Cobey, painting him warm and golden, a special creature.

It was, in all respects, a wonderful day.

— CD



Halloween, 1967, Seattle;

Not everything put into
the ground stayed there.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Mucho Mojo (Mysterious Press, \$19.95, 311pp) is being heralded as Joe R. Lansdale's long-awaited breakout book, and I think it very well could be exactly that. Lansdale's published a dozen and a half novels and story collections, edited several anthologies, written for such comics as *Jonah Hex*, and still isn't quite a household word. I hope this one'll do it for the guy. Much like S.K. Epperson and a number of other nifty writers, Lansdale tends to mix genres to good effect but to the distraction of marketing departments. He writes mystery, dark suspense, horror, western, other sorts of fiction—and often lets all these strains hybridize one another. He knows, too, the value of leavening the darkest material with humor, grim realism with moral passion. Lansdale possesses a strong sense of location, as well as a wonderful gift for regional voice. There's a touch of Harry Crews in him, a streak of Cormac McCarthy.

You get the whole Lansdale package in *Mucho Mojo*. Though little notice is taken of it, this novel is the second volume in a series that started with *Savage Season*, a paperback original from Bantam a few years back. Once again we meet Hap Collins, the anti-war ex-

con, still slaving in the stifling summer rose fields of East Texas. One day he's rescued by his gay black friend, Leonard Pine. Leonard's Uncle Chester has died in his house in the black slums of LaBorde, Texas, and Leonard wants his friend's support to get through the funeral.

Things get more complicated, of course, when the guys find the ghost-trapping bottle tree set up outside of Uncle Leonard's house. Then there's the none-too-neighborly crack house next door. But most disturbing of all is the package hidden below the floorboards of the living room: the desiccated skeleton of a murdered child, wrapped in porn magazines. Leonard can't believe that his Uncle Chester was a child-killing pervert. The police aren't so sure. He enlists Hap's aid to discover the truth in what escalates to a hunt for a nasty serial killer of children, and maybe even something more sinister.

What Lansdale proceeds to spin is not only a top-drawer thriller, but the social portrait of a society in painful evolution. His East Texas is a place of entrenched tradition in painful conflict with new ideas about race relations, gender politics, and more open

choices in sexual preference.

In *Mucho Mojo*, Lansdale grapples with some of the same societal problems concerning abuse and children as Andrew Vachss. Lansdale's sense of moral outrage is no less burning, but he attains a distinctly different effect by filtering the horror through a sense of blackest humor. Joe R. Lansdale keeps his own voice, and it's one well worth listening to and enjoying.

This is no paradigm for a detective novel. But a horrific crime novel? Yes. Lansdale's plot is far less important than the fascinating characters and their respective encounters and interrelationships. *Mucho Mojo* embodies its own definition of dark suspense; a tale of evil doings that will make you both laugh and wince, and keep on turning the pages.

Just as the U.S. has Thomas Monteleone's *Borderlands*, so Canada has Don Hutchison's *Northern Frights* (Mosaic Press, 85 River Rock Drive, Suite 202, Buffalo, NY 14207, \$13.95, 222pp). And we should treasure both. Each is a solid original anthology series covering the dark spectral shades of horror and dark fantasy. Neither has fallen prey to the narrower fo-

cus of the themed anthology. Both afford a fine venue for new and established writers alike.

The only downside to *Northern Frights*, a World Fantasy Award nominee, is that it thus far is a long way from hewing to any kind of annual publication schedule. But that is, of course, as we recognize from the geologically scaled delay before volume 12 of *Pulphouse: the Hardback Magazine*, not a killing offense; and definitely worth the wait.

While the first volume of *Northern Frights* appeared in a solid hardback form, this second volume is published as a handsome trade paperback. From its slick yeti-in-a-snowstorm cover illustration by Henry Van Der Linde, it's a highly professional job all the way. Editor Don Hutchison is not an unreasonable geochauvinist. The book's open to both Canadian writers and those from other climes; the stipulation is simply that the material has to, in whatever way, apply to Canada. Fair enough.

Along with a lucid and concise introduction by Hutchison (in which he, reasonably enough, invokes the spirits of Robertson Davies and W.P. Kinsella as examples of the breadth of net he'd like to cast across the dark waters of fantasy), the collection's got a poem by Carolyn Clink and 17 stories by oldtimers Hugh B. Cave and Edward D. Hoch, newtimers Cindie Geddes, Gemma Files, Diane L. Walton, and others, and such stalwarts as Chet Williamson, Charles Grant, Edo van Belkom, Nancy Kilpatrick, and Garfield Reeves-Stevens. There are no real clinkers here; some few fairly unremarkable examples of the storytelling craft appear, but these are far outweighed by the good stuff.

Charles Grant's "Sometimes, in the Rain" evokes the author's patented literary moodiness, but is far less oblique than usual. The story weaves together ghosts and

dying, aging and long-term relationships. It touches both raw nerves and the heart. "Punkins" by Nancy Kilpatrick pulls a grisly take on Halloween and that dubious old habit of carving up those jack-o-lantern faces.

In "The Eddies," Garfield Reeves-Stevens takes a manic and somewhat dizzying tilt at some Nicola Tesla mythic science, the disconcertingly tall CN Tower in Toronto, and some lethally pesky spectral revenants. It's a nonstop cinematic horror flick wrapped up in a taut novelette. Gemma Files' "Mouthful of Pins" is a deceptively quiet venture into the borderland between reality and madness. That's a capsule description that could be used for quite a few of the stories in this anthology.

Chet Williamson's "Other Errors, Other Times" isn't a major piece, but it's still a neat story in the classic mode about baseball and ghosts. Hugh B. Cave's "Vanishing Point" rings a different set of changes on Bradbury's "The Sound of Thunder." There's nothing like a small space-time continuum in the hills to help the sensible locals deal with obnoxious outsiders. "Emancipation" by Cindie Geddes rings in the rigors of the Canadian winter (a frequent image in the book), plenty of lupine lore, and a poignant examination of a woman's disintegration (and bizarre reintegration).

Mary E. Choo's "Feast of Ghosts" is a dreamlike take on vengeance and Asian myth. "These Broken Wings" by Sean Dolittle is a Canadian hunting tale in which the prey is angels. The conceit's nice; the story appends a peculiarly diluting epilogue. Shirley Meier's "Ice" is yet another personality-dismantling-in-the-winter portrait. Increasingly familiar.

The two major prizes in the volume are stories by James Powell and Dale L. Sproule. Sproule's "Fourth Person Singular" is a tale of bizarrely abused children that

resonates more with Shirley Jackson than V.C. Andrews. Renfield and Barrymore, Wren and Bear, live confined by their father in a huge old house. Wren builds scores of model aircraft which he hangs from the ceiling of his room. Everything's fairly placid—except for the nightly screaming from the basement. And just where is Mom? The imagery is bizarre here, the pain tangible, the occasional smiles uneasy.

James Powell's "The Code of the Poodles" is just plain weird. The title actually has a double meaning: the system of canine behavior adhered to by poodles, and the Morse Code-like system with which humans can communicate with the aforementioned dogs. Pet guardians, family plotting right out of a crazed Hitchcock picture, poodle communications work, a sinister cat with a disgusting taste for—but wait! Read the story. It charmed and amused even a jaded reviewer such as I.

So go, you curious readers, and seek out *Northern Frights 2*. The more brave souls who do so, the greater the likelihood that the gap between this and the next volume will be no longer than one major winter.

Fred Saberhagen's new offering is *Seance for a Vampire* (Tor, \$21.95, 288pp), an adventure featuring both Dracula and his distant cousin, the inimitable Sherlock Holmes.

The novel begins with a prologue narrated by Prince Dracula himself, marveling at certain unlikely ingredients in the story about to be recounted: "It is difficult to find the words with which to characterize this chain of events. It was more than grotesque, it was fantastic. Parts of it almost unbelievable. You'll see. Pirates, mesmerism, executions by hanging. Stolen treasure, murder, kidnapping, revenge and seduction. Women taken by force, attempts to materi-

alize the spirits of the dead ... I know what you are going to say. Everything in the above list is a bit out of the ordinary ..." Now remember just who is bemusedly stating the above. There is a certain fang-in-check, straight-faced, droll detachment to our narrator.

The game is rapidly afoot with a flashback to London's Execution Dock in June 1765. A Russian pirate named Kulakov and two other condemned prisoners are brought to the special low-tide execution site in a crook of the Thames for hanging. It's a nice evocative piece of historical writing Saberhagen does. The pirates are done in by order of the Admiralty. But that's not it for Kulakov. Comes night-fall and he reappears, a little the worse for wear and highly confused by his new state of undeath, but he's bound for revenge and the return of a stolen treasure. It's good old-fashioned melodrama. Bloody revenge in the night, a seductive supernatural betrayer dispatched to a ghastly end, a treasure apparently lost, a quest of perhaps centuries set out upon ... Pretty cool.

The novel then flashes forward to 1903. The lovely daughter of a moneyed English family is tragically drowned on a placid boat outing. A pair of young spiritualist mediums are engaged to contact her troubled spirit. The young woman does indeed seem to be manifesting in concrete form. Her passionate young gentleman friend is skeptical. Dr. Watson and his friend, the great Sherlock Holmes, are engaged to see if a fraud is being perpetrated.

Things then escalate, with all the elements mentioned in the shopping list previously enumerated by the vampire prince. And once it appears that a genuine vampire is involved in the case, that most useful of exotic cousins, Prince Dracula is solicited for help.

Not only does he do his job well as a literary historian, Saber-

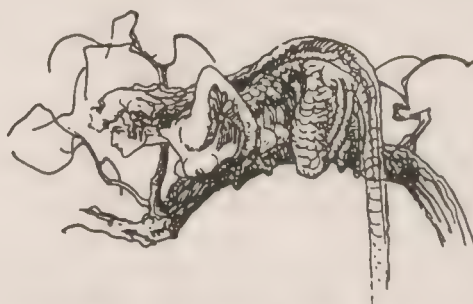
hagen also does a pretty fair job of capturing the air of Conan Doyle's storytelling. There is indeed a fair amount of genuine sex and violence incorporated into this heated saga; but it is told so genteelly, it would be hard for the reader of even the most tender sensibility to take offense.

Or maybe another way of putting it is that this is not a novel that clones Skipp, Schow, Spector, or even Poppy Z. Brite. Nope, this is

not splatterpunk. Here we have quiet horror, exuberant but mannered. What could easily be performed as overheated excess is kept reined in in the best Victorian manner.

Saberhagen on *Masterpiece Theatre*? Why the heck not.

Jay R. Bonansinga's *The Black Mariah* (Warner, \$5.99, 352pp) is a first novel from a new writer being heavily promoted by his publisher.



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This one's solid road-trip fiction, good buddy. The novel starts with the eponymous eighteen-wheeler truckin' on down I-75 through the Georgia night. The unlikely driver-team is composed of Lucas, gentle, solid, and black; and Sophie Cohen, acerbic, lithe, and Jewish. They've had a solid, nonromantic, working relationship for a good long while, and they aim to keep it that way.

Then Lucas gets the weird request for help on the CB. There's a kid in an old Camaro that's running out of fuel. Problem is, the driver cannot stop the car or terrible things will happen. The refueling will have to be accomplished on the fly, as it were. We get introduced to a voodoo curse and an old, old vengeance-driven woman named Vanessa DeGeaux.

Eventually convinced, Lucas and Sophie try for a vehicle-to-vehicle fueling *en passant*. This leads to a lot of highly visual mayhem, culminating in the Camaro finally stopping, and the young driver meeting a horrendous incendiary death. All very well and good, except that the curse involved has passed on to Lucas, Sophie, and Angel, the young Hispanic they've picked up along the way. If they go, they live. If they stop, they die. And now the police are chasing them. And the diesel's running low.

There's nothing wrong with this novel that a little more thought and some rewriting couldn't have helped. It's perfectly sound melodrama. And when we finally get to the last few plot complications, the story gets actively interesting. But the fact that it's so damned facile is probably a genuine problem. It's easy to see this novel as a movie. The slickness and the sheer momentum of the storytelling work to keep the reader from noticing that the characters and some of the plot elements are stumbling from time to time. *The Black Maria* reads something like a script noveliza-

tion. Is the potentially fascinating relationship between Sophie Cohen and Lucas ever convincingly evoked? Not really. The author tries, but keeps, it seems, getting distracted by bloody deaths and things blowing up spectacularly.

Close to the end, when Lucas and Vanessa DeGeaux are face to face and we come to understand just what it is that drives the old woman, then there is some genuine insight. The good stuff. But the author unfortunately rushes it all, trying to keep up the pace at the expense of the most intriguing and complex scene in the whole book.

So the book is good, but not deep, and that's okay. The frustration is that the book could have been equally as fast-paced, visual, and exciting, but much more ambitious. Maybe that will happen in Bonansinga's second novel. I hope so. He's clearly got a great deal of talent. The question is just how that talent will be channeled.

C. Dean Andersson is something of a peculiarly held secret in modern horror writing. I suspect his work is never encountered by a number of readers simply because it appears in indifferently packaged mass paperbacks with titles such as *Raw Pain Max* and *Torture Tomb*. Sometimes he appears under the byline, "Asa Drake." In other words, he's lumped in with the great mass of midlist horror writers who rarely get picked out for the distinction gained by the Barkers and Brites and Simmonses and Kojas.

Now I'm also not attempting to suggest that Andersson is *the* great white (or reptilian green, or blood red) hope of the modern horror field. But I do think he's a hell of a lot more interesting a writer than most give him credit for; and he certainly should not be ignored.

Fiend (Zebra, \$4.50, 320pp) is his new novel, and it's a cornucopia of mixed blessings. Some of them

are quite fine. Andersson and his close associate, Nina Romberg, both write quite seriously about paganism and Goddess-oriented religion in their dark fantasies. They probably treat this particular spiritual system more seriously than do any other writers in popular fiction. Andersson, in his work, kids about a lot of things, but never, not *ever*, about the Goddess.

Fiend actually contains several different stories. First there's T.T. Dysan, a newly minted mass murderer in Dallas. He's your basic disaffected white-collar guy who decides, for all the usual wacko reasons, to kill his kids and his wife. Then he goes off to a huge Texas comic book convention. Little does he know he's going to go up against Medea, yes *that* Medea, immortal and vengeful, who's devoting her cons on this Earth to killing the murderers of children.

Then there's Joe Clark, an innocent (he thinks) young man who's come up with a new comic book heroine named Toxique. He heads off for the comic con hoping to sell his creation to one of the major companies, or one of the minor ones, *anybody*. He's desperate.

Joe suddenly finds himself involved with Medea, indeed initiated into the circle of Hecate-respecting acolytes who serve Medea. More, it seems that Medea is pursuing through all time the incarnative forms of Jason, the one who really killed her children. It seems that she holds something of a grudge against the playwright Euripedes for his libelous play. Now this is one great conceit. This is the kind of touch for which I'm always willing to plunge into the morass of the paperback midlist.

So Joe becomes an *empusa*, an acolyte, starts to learn a whole new metaphysical system, sells his comic book, helps to fight the child-killer, and then begins to fall into all sorts of plot twists. No one expects the Spanish Inquisition, as

Monty Python used to say. Things do keep happening in this book. T.T. Dysan is quickly disposed of. Then the souls of his child victims have to be dealt with. And then, then, Joe Clark's Toxique turns out to have a bizarre and malign life of her own. And then—Well, let's just say that the revelations keep on happening.

I particularly enjoyed the dead-on descriptions of the folks who put on and participate in comics conventions. Naturally there's some psychological overlap with SF con culture. At one point, Medea asks Joe if he's hip to Valkyries. Our callow young protagonist responds: "Valkyries? Sure. I read a graphic novel version of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* a couple of years back, and I've seen Valkyries in issues of *Thor*. One of my favorite characters in *The New Mutants* when I was a kid stayed in Asgard and became a Valkyrie ..." Now that's funny. And telling.

Andersson tries to make his novel a lot of things. It's got an anti-child abuse female character Andrew Vachss would approve of. It's got a lot of amusingly observed detail about the comics world. It's got serious spiritual content. It's got plenty of melodrama, a little yucky violence, and some warm erotic content.

If it's got a problem, it's merely that Andersson's writerly grasp of his materials varies widely from moment to moment, page to page. The writing gets much smoother after the beginning, but there's still quite a range of style here, and not always as graceful as one could wish. Or maybe I can put it another way. The book possesses a rough grace.

Take note of it.

SHORT TAKES

The present cornucopia of specialty press chapbooks continues to issue forth a fascinating variety of items. One is *Not Broken*,

Not Belonging (Roadkill Press, c/o Little Bookshop of Horrors, 10380 Ralston Rd., Arvada, CO 80004, \$6 + pstg, 30pp), a volume that could be considered Roadkill's first art book. The project is something of a variation on the familiar concept of novelizing a feature film. Writer Randy Fox has constructed a short story around six paintings and an equal number of sketches and details by Tennessee artist, Alan M. Clark. Clark's work here is concerned with imagery that one might describe as surreal nature-image organic grotesquerie. Or something like that. Driftwood and other debris contorted into effigies of deteriorating human bodies. It's solidly disturbing. The paintings were originally executed in color, but the reduced monochrome versions in this chapbook are quite effective, and the reproduction works just fine. Fox's story deals with the recovery of a woman who disappeared some months earlier. She mysteriously reappears without explanation, apparently is subject to some bizarre form of synesthesia, and is hospitalized. Her husband, who had already given up on her and found a new lover, is bewildered by the whole thing. The story is not completely successful, but there are dark, twisting images that continue to haunt me. All in all, it's a reasonably successful collaboration of the visual and the written media. And Clark's art is not to be missed.

Thank God. The only time the pseudonymous S. Darnbrook Colson's old moniker, "the bad boy of horror," is mentioned is its amusing citation in Wayne Allen Sallee's brief and entertaining introduction to this chapbook of three interrelated tales. *People of the Night's* (Three Stones Publications, POB 68817, Seattle, WA 98168, \$4.95 + \$1 pstg, 38pp) trio of tales takes place in an unnamed U.S. city (probably on the East Coast) in some near crumbling future. It's a bleak, Hobbesian fu-

ture in which just about everything is nasty, brutish, and short. Colson's stories show us life in the darkzone after the more affluent city dwellers have set up a ghetto for the violent, the poor, the otherwise undesirable. "Brotherhood of the Dark" gives us the relationship between legless beggar Manny and his black hooker friend, Tawanna. It's a lesson about love, committed friendship, and racism. In "People of the Night," Chili's an enterprising survivor-type who moves from rolling, raping, and killing misguided sailors to a liaison with a callow, under-age, overstimulated poppet child of privilege named Marionette. It's a tough story, but torpedoed by something of an unlikely plot solution. "Darksiders" travels a little farther into the urban future when apparent gang loser Harte Green finds the redemptive process triggered by a stolen Monet. Tough is a good adjective for all the writing herein. Colson's making considerable progress in infusing graphic, violent, horrific urban horror with heart, and even a little tenderness. These stories suggest that a novel based on Colson's urban vision might well be a good idea. This signed chapbook is illustrated with suitably stark monochrome art by B.E. Bothell.

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SALOME

MICHAEL SHEA

MICHAEL SHEA is an award-winning writer of dark fantasy fiction. Well-respected as a master stylist, his work is lean and mean and sophisticated. "Salome" is his *Cemetery Dance* debut.

Rod hadn't been pronging Courtney for half a minute—not even ten seconds—when astonishment filled his mind like a flood of light. He was himself again! He'd been someone else for almost a year without quite realizing it, and all it took was easing himself into Courtney's ginger-tufted pubic patch (more girlish than Barbara's glossy black pelt), smelling Courtney's scent (more delicate, flowery, than Barbara's rich musk), tasting Courtney's tongue (sleanderer, slicker, shyder than Barbara's)—all it took was a few seconds of boning another woman, and he felt himself come back to himself with a rush. This was Rod Norse, also Rod Wadd of X-rated fame, a man who had slid himself into a new pink—at least one new pink—every day of his adult life, or damn near.

He had known something was wrong, of course. A year's fidelity to one woman, even a breathtaking, volcanic she-beast like Barbara Sauciere, was, for a stud of Rod's caliber, alarming. It was dysfunctional. And his growing sense of wrongness, of dysfunction, was the reason he and Courtney were here now, in Barbara's bed under the big skylight on the second floor of her Bel-Air mansion.

But knowing something was wrong, and feeling this kind of total rightness, were a world apart. When Courtney, Barbara's Best Friend, called this morning, saying she was thinking of dropping by, wondering if Barbara was in, it was not the first time she had dangled this sly bit of bait for Rod. And it had filled Rod with the same strange flood of indifference that every bit of pink, winking at him from the sidelines of the straight-and-narrow, had filled him with this past year, since his moving in with Barbara. Inertia chilled his loins. A bored voice muttered in him: too many moves for too slight a return.

But this grotesque fidelity had to end. The thought it might be known, and laughed at, tortured Rod increasingly of late. With a sharp effort of conscious will, he had taken Courtney's bait. Had said,

"Does Barbara *have* to be here for you to drop by, Court?" It was surprisingly hard to do. He scarcely managed a suave tone, hearing a tremor in his voice, and as soon as he'd hung up he went to the kitchen to build a stiff Bloody Mary. Incredible, this flutter in his guts! It was almost like ... anxiety.

He had a second Mary in him by the time Courtney arrived and defiantly took her, of all the bedrooms the house offered, here to the big round bed he and Barbara had shared these past twelve months.

And now, no sooner was he socketed in Courtney's newness, than he knew his old self again. Unshackled, he sheathed himself in her silky skin, jockeying her like his Jag up, up, up through the curves to her peaks, shooting her off of them, piloting her down like a glider through orgasm's free-fall. Free! Free at last!

It was not that Barbara left him hungry. Barbara Sauciere, enigmatic millionairess, was a force of nature, devouring him with endless appetite, ferocious glee, and Rod had early on discovered, amazed, that his appetite for her was equally unflagging. She only had to give him that slanty look from her hot dark eyes, and his balls flared alight like match heads raked by a thumbnail. She had him performing far past himself, past even his adolescent levels. But it was this sense that she contained him—that was what this fidelity translated to, that he was turning into someone unknown to himself, who lived only within and for Barbara's dark beauty and fierce will.

He came in Courtney for the fourth time, his spirit jetting far and free with his seed, jetting out of Barbara's thirty-room manse, jetting high over the swimming pool, the tennis courts, the acres of lawn, high and away out over Beverly Hills, Hollywood, far and gone above the cited plain.

He went down to make them some drinks, leaving Courtney with a kiss sprawled voluptuously on Barbara's black silk sheets. Women. He loved their sinuous simplicity. So many curves and indirections to them, so few and simple their key desires. Here was Courtney nested in Barbara's sheets, goal scored, touchdown, every lax line of her body proclaiming contentment: she had Barbara's bed, and Barbara's

man. She had bested her Best Friend.

The kitchen tiles were cool to Rod's bare feet, and, making the drinks, feeling the house's big emptiness around him, haunted by Barbara's betrayed spirit, he found his thoughts taking a cool and shivery turn. Here was that ... unease again. Bizarre! Was it that he felt Barbara might ... take vengeance? Like, hire some muscle to break parts of him? Rod knew just what everyone else knew about where Barbara's money came from: absolutely nothing. This kind of personal invisibility was impressive; it certainly made criminal connections seem plausible. Was this it? And had a half-conscious sense of this danger been working on him all along?

No. The idea simply didn't fit Barbara. Paying to have his legs broken just didn't *feel* like her. Betrayal would enrage her ... but Barbara's rage would be more personal, it wouldn't take the form of hired muscle. She owned him and relished owning him; that wild, glittery-eyed smile of hers told Rod this at odd moments. They might be dining, or driving somewhere, or dancing, or fucking, and he would look at her and there it would be, this smile. She relished him, gloated over him in some gleeful, private place in her mind. But Rod now realized that what she was thinking, feeling when she looked at him like this, was absolutely dark to him.

Rod was no talker. He left it to the women to make the conversation, and they were always talkative in their delight to have him, in their eagerness to captivate him. But Barbara never needed to fill the silences Rod made. Easy and smiling, she could sit all through dinner with him and not say a word, her eyes, when his sought them, showing him her affection, her secret merriment.

He took the drinks back upstairs. Pronging Courtney was easier than this probing in the shadows Barbara cast. Courtney was here and now.

They drank, and Courtney talked. She said, "I'd rather die than hurt Barbara—she's like a sister to me," and all the earnest bullshit that went with this. Rod poured a dollop of his drink into her bellybutton, and sucked it out. He slid his tongue up her middle, and sucked her little *café au lait* nipples till they were hard and pebbly. Gently he nudged her labia with the cushy mushroom of his glans until they were fat and sopping. He entered her inchingly, inexorably, feeling the wavefronts of pleasure roll through her, one after another, up the countless branchings of her nerves. She gripped him with all she had, with fingers, arms, legs, cunt, mouth—he wore her body as snug as a glove and pumped her fuller and fuller of his will till her lips and tits were swollen taut with it. This was going to be the best one yet, he was going to go off like a geyser this time, and Barbara was mixed in it now, he was smelling Barbara's peppery musk from the sheets, flashing on

her opulent body even as his eyes feasted on Courtney's. One of Barbara's faintly funky teddies hung from a bedpost above them, haunting their cheaters' fuck like a sexy ghost, or a slutty angel, and the orgasm that was almost on him now was for both women at once, he was fucking them both now and loving it, each silken, socketing impact blowing starbursts of neural fire out of the backs of his eyeballs, dazzling his brain, making him tingle down to his footsoles. Soon now, oh, soon.

Salome, Barbara's pampered Calico cat, leapt onto the bed with them, causing Rod's rhythm to falter with guilty shock. Salome liked to join Rod and Barbara at just such moments as these—to Barbara's unfailing delight and Rod's poorly masked annoyance. How had the beast gotten in? However she had, she was true to her usual form in delaying her entrance until the humans were so far along towards climax that they were powerless to eject her. Then here she came, slinky-sinewy, purring, eyes half closed and sultry, threading herself between them in their rutting, rubbing and nuzzling in that obscene, shameless participation that cats seek when they find their humans mating.

The little monster's pumping paws and kneading claws worked on Rod's sweating flanks; her rough, hot, shocking little tongue raked his ribs. Rod loathed it but was too far gone to stop now. Courtney wailed and came, and Rod came, too, and just as he did, Salome unleashed the hissing shriek of a banshee and slashed her claws across his buttocks.

He bellowed, stunned by an explosive ejaculation. Belatedly, he lashed out, and his hand met only air. The animal was gone.

They lay gasping a moment—it seemed to Rod he had never come so hard in his life. But then they realized that he was bleeding abundantly, and it galvanized them with a sudden panic not to mark Barbara's bedclothes with bloodstains. Courtney stanchd his scratches with the nearest things at hand—her bra and underwear. In the bathroom they bandaged him properly and then Courtney had a wild whim—exquisite, upper-crust Courtney! She put on her underclothes, gaudily splashed with his gore. "Just another casualty of love," she grinned, archly posing.

Perhaps it was delayed shock from his wound, but Rod's stomach turned violently to see her spattered costume. His face broke sweat and he barely fought down his urge to vomit; he had to cover it as a spell of dizziness, and joke about love's excess.

As they stepped out the front door, Courtney squealed and stumbled, almost fell. Salome had bolted out of nowhere right under her feet. As Rod steadied Courtney, the cat jumped into the hood of his black Jag—a Valentine's Day present from Barbara—and crouched there, ears flattened, hissing at them, its

yellow eyes moving from Rod to Courtney and back to Rod. The beast's air of challenge so unnerved them they stood frozen for a heartbeat, till Rod's wound flared, and anger with it, and he stooped for a rock from the plantings. When he turned again, arm cocked, Salome was gone.

The lovers drove their separate ways when they reached the Strip. Rod cruised, waiting to feel some afterglow, at least some pride in his emancipation from fidelity. Instead he found a nagging anxiety. He would need some story to explain his wounded buttocks to Barbara. It was a grotesque dilemma, a joke, really, but its seriousness grew the more he considered it. The claw marks were like a branding; Barbara's instant inference, on seeing the wounds, would be that Rod had been fucking.

The day was cool and overcast—saying he'd been sunning nude by the pool was out. Could he say he'd been in the rec room, lying naked on a towel after the jacuzzi? It was something he never did. And the gist of it wouldn't go away: Salome never touched him, never approached him, unless he was having sex with Barbara.

His sense of entanglement in this petty problem became intensely aggravating. He grew more convinced by the minute that his best course might actually be to leave town for a few days and let the scratch heal before facing Barbara. At least a trip would give him scope to invent some pretext for the wound.

It burned him even now. He could feel each claw track distinctly, five hot slashes. The same number of times he'd pronged Courtney. Five.

He could leave, and say he'd been to the desert, to Hot Springs for the spa, for example, and make up something with a cactus. Were there actual cactuses out there ...?

In any case, there was no way he would tell Barbara it was Salome. If she knew it was the cat that had scratched him, then she'd instantly know *why*. In fact, one of Barbara's odd little jokes recurred to him now with a ridiculous kind of relevance; sometimes, in her infrequent bursts of playfulness, Barbara would stroke Salome on her lap and say things in the beast's ear aimed archly at him. "I *know* this man of mine's behaving," she would tell the cat. "My sweet little Salome would tell me if she saw him being bad. My sweet little Salome helps me out when I need it, doesn't she? She does just what I tell her ..." And the two females, human and feline, would look at him, their unlike eyes glinting with the same feral gleam.

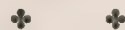
In the end Rod got sick of his own queasy brooding. If Barbara found out, worst case, he'd be thrown out. Big deal! He'd start boning some other rich pink, and have her give him a different color Jag. Because it was time to get a grip! What kind of wuss was he turning into here? What had the bitch been doing to

him? Some kind of fancy drug in his food, maybe? Hypnosis? Look how he was sitting here sweating things, brooding and worrying like some twist on the rag ...

Rod stopped for a Martini or three, his drink of choice in the afternoon. He drove back to Bel Air feeling no pain, and most definitely feeling no anxiety, making the Jag's engine race and the tires squeal on the curves up into the hills. He didn't have to explain shit to Barbara about scratches on his ass or anything else. At the same time, he also knew he was getting home soon enough to throw a few things together and be gone somewhere before Barbara got home.

He built a drink in the kitchen, and carried it, sipping, on a quick tour of inspection for overlooked clues of the morning. Then he went to the phone and checked the messages.

He replayed only the first one on the tape: a call from the Emergency Room at Memorial Hospital, telling him Barbara was in Intensive Care after an auto accident a little after noon today—just about the time, some voice whispered to him, that he and Courtney were having their last wild fuck.



He wasn't allowed near Barbara's bed; there, high-tech hookups dominated, and high-priced doctors. He could see her in there, an oblong shape of white linen webbed in tubes. Barbara was all still, icy whiteness, except for one tress of her raven-black hair that escaped the bandage on her head, and excepting too her vivid red lips, proud and sensual.

Rod found something queenly in the sight. All unconscious, still Barbara could conjure up all this medical sorcery. Of course her mere wealth—wherever it came from—would do as much: let her be stricken, and doctors sprang up on all sides of her. But Barbara had something more, had an aura about her. The medicos moved with a hushed, devotional air, and a kind of radiance shone from her stillness. Her coma faintly hummed with power, like a dynamo.

A junior doctor superciliously explained to Rod that, in essence, every scan known to man was being done. The doctor's awareness that Rod, though an intimate of the patient's, had no connection with her money, hung almost palpably in the air between them. The doctor had spoken, was turning away, when Rod blurted, "So what are her chances? I mean for recovery?"

"Well, as I think I indicated, with certain key reservations, I'd say they were good—all subject to the outcome of ongoing tests, of course."

"Of course."

A strangeness hit Rod then, as he stood looking into that room. There was something about this whole

scene, Barbara lying in state, her red mouth and lock of black hair the sole touches of glamour amid all the gowns of white or drab green, amid consoles and LCDs and tubing—there was something theatrical about it all. Staged.

This feeling lodged like a particle of glass in his brain, and he couldn't dislodge it. He drove back up into the hills, night falling now. Could it be he was getting a little screwy? Maybe drinking too much? So vivid that sensation was, almost like hallucination! That powerful sense he had that Barbara wasn't truly lying in the deep-freeze of coma; that she was lying in state, and all those doctors—courtiers—were just milling around, awaiting her further orders ...

Back home again, Rod wandered from room to room, feeling taut and touchy, like a balloon that might pop if he accidentally bumped into something sharp. He was coming down from the morning's fucking and all the drinks.

He made a tall, stiff vodka and tonic, and dropped in twists of lime. The bruised green rinds sank into the vodka's chill like drowned swimmers at peace with their fate. He took the drink to the rec room and got into the Vibra-Lounge. He set the chair back to horizontal, what he thought of as NASA lift-off mode, for star-traveling. He used the remote box to kill the room lights and turn on the floodlights and the air-jets in the vast jacuzzi, to get a kind of tropical background of hissing water and ripply, aqueous underlighting that shuddered on the shadowy ceiling.

He lay in the half-dark, taking the vodka with a Flex straw, only having to lift his head a little. The illusion of escape was achieved. This was some Pacific Paradise, the ferny bank of a moonlit stream.

He reflected that right now Barbara lay supine as he did. On being shown the accident report (by a cop with a polite face and mean, mocking eyes) Rod had learned that she'd rolled off the highway just about exactly when he and Courtney were getting launched on number five. *It was utterly casual*, Rod told Barbara in his mind. *And I was thinking of you the whole time. It sounds phony, but I really was!* He sipped vodka, thinking: *It's all right. She does not know. The scratches will be healed by the time she is well. She will never know.*

He drained his glass. Spikes of icy Stolichnaya stilettoed down through his nerves, nailing him with delicious numbness to the chair that cradled him. But he found himself picturing the redness of Barbara's mouth again, the blackness of that crow's wing of her hair that escaped the bandages. Somehow these vivid details spoke a secret, crazy language of fear to him. Barbara knew of his infidelity. She knew, and she had not really been struck down, she had withdrawn to lie in state in that hospital. Strategically withdrawn from him, knowing his crime ...

Craziness, pure and simple. Time to go mix

another drink. It was then Rod discovered that he could not move. He could ... not ... *move!* Not a foot. Not a finger. He could not even raise his head.

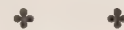
He could not even *try* to move, could not even cause a tightening in the least of his muscles! His will hung in a bubble, connected to no part of him.

Was this some freak alcohol overdose? Would his lungs freeze up next? Would he suffocate? Not possible, not with—what? Seven or eight drinks in the course of a day? Ten at the most? Anyway, his breathing was fine, and he wasn't numb. He could feel things. Could feel, for instance, a slight breeze from the door to the hallway as it creaked gently open.

He lay in terror, still as stone. Was someone coming in? He couldn't lift, or even turn, his head to look. He heard no footsteps. It was probably just a breeze pushing the door open. Dear Christ, why couldn't he *move*?

Something gripped him by the ankle. His heart gave a wallow of terror in his unmoving chest, and his bladder would have let go if it had still been connected to his consciousness. Little clawed pads got a purchase on his pant leg and vaulted up. He could not tilt his head even enough to see his own feet, but he knew it was the compact and sinewy tread of a cat that now moved along his leg and crossed his midriff.

Salome—now he could see her calico muzzle—advanced across his chest. Her face was the most extravagant nightmare he'd ever had, seen from this angle, this victim's vantage. Her opalescent, upslanted eyes, the bristly caves of her radaring ears, were pure terror to a man who could not move a finger. There was a ... a strut to her gait, a swagger of ownership. She stood on his throat and lowered her face to his and he could smell her carrion breath. She put her forepaws to his lips, and pried, with padded strength, his jaws apart. Glaring into his eyes, she opened her mouth and hissed. A gust of pure Barbara welled into his throat and nostrils—her musk, her sweat, her perfume, Rod was gorged with Barbara's mingled essences. And then the beast lowered her muzzle further, more intimately deep into his mouth, and inhaled. Her little lungs with surprising power pulled the air out of Rod's own. His lungs collapsed in the vacuum. His thoughts were snatched from his brain by that terrible, blinding, annihilating suction.



Rod saw a wolf spider crossing the patio's flagstones—a big one, as big as his paw. Only faint light from the house's windows dusted the spider's bristly abdomen and busy legs, and yet Rod, seeing the creature through Salome's eyes, found it abundantly visible, seething with movement in the dark.

The cat was wired to leap at such a sight, and Rod



couldn't restrain the taut little body imprisoning him. He and the animal sprang, their tail unfurling to balance the leap, and their paw stunned the spider with a swipe. They sniffed the prey and then neatly bit off the soft, oozy raisin of the spider's abdomen; its silken pus was surprisingly pleasant to Rod's raspy tongue. Not unlike seafood, he thought.

The cat licked her chops, feral drives discharged for the moment. Such pauses were opportunities to control the animal. Rod exerted his will, sending the pulse of his desires through the alien tissue. In the hour since he'd wakened to his transplantation, Rod was only now fitfully managing to steer the beast. He was learning to move it by radiating raw bursts of his wishes through this meat-machine that had dragged him into its cogs, into this unimaginable nightmare through which he prowled lithely on all fours. He'd been able to discover this trick of concentration only after subduing his panic, subduing his fear which was a thrashing, mad giant in his mind that seemed it might thrash him to pieces.

But Rod knew how to go with his body, even when his body had been switched on him. He fought down the terror of it, to be padding around inside a tiny panther, seeing everything through inhuman eyes, seeing the neon-and-smog stained sky in hues of hemorrhage and bruise that he had never imagined ...

Now, by concentrating, he could move the animal when it wasn't strung tight on some drive. In a way, it was like boning a pink, fucking her scientifically along, running his current through her wiring. But it was *trickier* than boning. It was like pulling on a glove that kept melting off your hand. Control unpredictably vanished, and the carnivore swallowed him up in her will again.

Rod got Salome, sated by spidermeat, to pad her way past the pool, heading around back, toward the one-story bathhouse near the mansion's east wall. He got her moving at a slight trot, building momentum, his hopes rising as the cat-body kicked in to his intent, for here at the bathhouse wall they must *jump*, claw right up the trellis of vines, get on the roof. Salome, with a slight lag of confusion in her movements, nonetheless made the climb, her claws biting the soft red-wood lath and tearing down a rain of leaves.

Where was the conscious devil who had sucked Rod out of his body? That leering monster that had opened his mouth and thrust her whiskered snout inside it? This animal imprisoning him was mindless, automatic—seemed unaware she contained him.

Once on the bathhouse roof, Salome must stop to wash herself, the instinctive feline display of nonchalance after a flawed athletic performance. Rod had learned there was no way he could prevent her doing this at frequent intervals, much though he loathed the careful licking the animal always gave her asshole.

When the lickdown was done, he was able to move her again, thrusting in her, cat-fucking her forward to jump up onto a low-thrust eave of Spanish tile, and climb up onto the roof of the house itself. Again the beast was faintly awkward, perhaps feeling jockeyed now, and half-balking at it. Salome performed a second, briefer lickdown.

But then, just a little farther was all he had to nudge her, up to the skylight over the rec room, the last place he had been when he was still in possession of his body. He had to see what was going on in there—know his rightful body's separate fate.

He humped the animal harder, faster, for the skylight, praying the furry little bitch would stay with it, move to his pumping.

Salome slammed to a halt and froze in a crouch. They'd run into the smell of danger, into a blast of pheromones riddling them like radioactive sleet. Down there on the eave, just above the rain gutter, was a huge, tattered gray tomcat. A twenty-pounder at least, the monster crouched, ears flattened, eyes hot amber, frozen in mid-advance with one paw foremost. Aggression welled in freezing molecular fronts from the tom's glands, and cascades of adrenaline rippled through Salome's muscles in response. Dear God, Rod thought, was that thing going to fuck them?

The beast looked big as a tiger to Rod, but Salome, even in terror, growled, radiating the scent of her hate against the interloper. It held the brute at bay. The tom flattened his ears a notch, a feral hint of accommodation. Now Salome, working her own will, edged up the rest of the way to the skylight, taking the nearest high ground.

She crouched on the skylight and stared down into the tom's eyes, and the game of cat-patience began, the big tom waiting, yellow-eyed, for the first sign of crumbling, of concession in the she-cat's posture. And with a chill Rod understood that this tom was not here about fucking. He was here about clawing. He was here about killing.

At least now Rod could see down into the Activity Room, where he had last possessed his own beloved body.

Down in the rec room, the main lights were on, the Vibra-Lounge empty, the jacuzzi turned off. Just beyond the jacuzzi, recessed in the wall, was the daz-lingly pink-tiled bath, with mirrors that multiplied a forest of many-colored bottles and jars. In these mirrors there were fragments of movement. Someone was there, at the makeup counter in a corner he couldn't see from this skylight. Rod must get to the next one over.

So violently did he thrust his will into Salome that it made her start. It marred her perfect poise and, because it looked like fear, this launched the tom's attack. He came whirling up the tiles, a blizzard of

claws. The bitch-cat fell on one side and rabbit-clawed his belly with her hind claws as his rush dragged her under. Razors slashed Rod's ears and furry flanks. They rolled, twisting and kicking, and Rod and Salome kicked the tom off. They went into a new crouch on the next skylight over, while the tom circled sullenly, driven back, but not far back.

And now Rod could see who was in the half-bath. Rod could look down and see himself sitting at the makeup counter.

His stolen self sat down there at the tiled counter, leaning close to the mirror-wall, doing something to his face, doing some careful and minute work on his face ... in that moment madness was a black whirlpool sucking down on Rod, the true Rod, cat-imprisoned. His sanity almost fell, kicking and screaming, into the impossible distance he saw now, this heart-freezing gulf between himself and himself.

What was that little tool that he—that Rod there!—was applying to his mouth? Was it a file? Was that what he was doing down there? *Was he filing his teeth?*

It was after a moment impossible to doubt: the Rod-body (Not himself now! Someone else! Something else!) the Rod-body was leaning his face up close to the mirror and minutely, patiently, with tiny, self-caressing thrusts, filing his front teeth down to points. Rod could just hear the filing sound, like a muted cricket, through the heavy glass of the skylight.

The cats sat utterly still, adrenaline bombs watching each other for the signal to blow.

In the house below, the phone rang. Rod could just hear its multiple chirr from all eight of the extensions. He watched himself set down the file. He saw by the file's red handle that it was the one he used to keep his Buck Knife sharp. He saw himself set down the file and pick up the phone.

He watched himself speak in a voice easy and intimate, just below audibility. He watched himself smile as he spoke, displaying the little triangles of darkness he had created between his teeth. His grin looked ragged, cheerfully insane.

Instantly Rod knew who his fanged pseudo-self was talking to. He watched himself hang up the phone, and a clock began ticking in his mind: Courtney already hurrying out and tucking herself into her Beemer. Courtney sliding out of her drive and beginning to thread the route through the hills, the lights of the Valley blazing below her ...

Rod must escape the roof. He had to get down to the driveway and somehow be positioned to keep Courtney from entering the house. Megavolts of fear hummed through him; he hammered at the bitch-cat's body.

Salome resisted him for an endless time, but she was worn down by the duel of stares, and in the end she got up, carefully, carefully, growling low. She

raised her head and showed her fangs.

(Now Courtney would be cruising the last couple miles, the Beemer's top down probably, her scarf-bound hair twisting like dark, pent flames in the wind ...)

Salome began to move, a slow, prowling step along the roof's ridge line. The tom was up too. There seemed less murder in him somehow—something still dangerous, but also gamesome in his yellow eyes. He matched her, paralleling her, or perhaps edging just an inch closer. Rod's panic hammered at Salome and she began another slow step, laterally along the roof-peak, her growl getting louder, her tail beginning to lash and slash.

Courtney was entering this street! Rod knew that Beemer's pitch, and wasn't that it out there, gearing up for the last slope to Barbara's hilltop? Another slow step, matched by the tom which was—yes—edging closer. Then another, slightly less-slow step, and there came Courtney's Beemer, nosing to a stop in front of the house, and Salome broke and ran, and the tom launched itself after her, a claw-tipped comet of fur.

Their claws crackled across the roof tiles; they streaked down the ridge line, the bigger cat two strides behind, holding tight for all the she-cat's desperate speed. Acres and acres of roof, it seemed, and there was the *thunk* of the Beemer's door ... the opening of the front door ... voices ... Salome reached the front of the house and leapt, hanging tiny in the gulf of empty air.

They were still falling, Salome and Rod, as Courtney's voice rose: "How awful! Is she going to be all right?" Then they crashed down into cushiony blackness, the convertible's back seat, as the front door closed and cut off her excited voice. They sprang out of the car just as the tom came hurtling down to strike where they had been. It was out a beat behind them, and instantly in close pursuit. The yellow-eyed devil drove them hard, zigged them and zagged them. They were running full out, and had to veer exactly as the demon steered. Back to the bathhouse it ran them, and again up the trellis, and again up onto the bathhouse roof, and thence back onto the roof of the house.

And once on the roof, it drove them just where it wanted them—onto another skylight. This was the skylight that looked down on Rod's and Barbara's bed. Here the tom, when he had treed them on the glass, backed down a step, crouched, and waited.

Approaching the glass, Rod had heard harsh sounds within the house, muffled barks of pain. As he looked down through it, these cries exploded into screams.

Rod beheld red carnivorous horror. He could look straight into Courtney's stunned, up-staring eyes, already turning glassy with shock. Rod understood

what was happening. Understood who was making this nightmare for him. As Rod and Courtney had feasted on one another in this bed this morning, so again now—except that now, only Rod feasted.

And as Rod had the thought, his own fang-mouthed face, smeared red, turned to look up at him with a fierce, lascivious humor. Rod felt Salome grow liquid around him, or felt himself grow denser and begin to leak out of the crude weave of the cat's tissues. Rod felt himself sinking out of the cat, falling from her belly, and his powerless will clutched desperately to grip its inhuman refuge. It failed and Rod fell, fell back to himself. Fell back down to himself grinning up at his fall with Barbara's eyes.

Groggily, as after a long upward fight through drunkenness, Rod opened his eyes, possessed himself again. What was that sound outside, like banshees in the street? Police vehicles? His body felt like an intolerable burden, a gross excess of bone and muscle. His eyes focused, and he came woozily up on all fours and saw what shared the vast mattress with him, abundantly splashing it with color. Rod understood his sense of heaviness was not mere contrast with his recent littleness. His human belly, hugely swollen, bulged under him. His jaws ached, and he was wet all over.

He remained there, still on all fours, dizzy by the reek of blood, struggling sluggishly inside his skull to shed this hideous nightmare he was now embedded in. It seemed that calls had been made, yes, for here were vehicles and loud radios and voices out front, and hammerings of doors, and more voices and the drumbeats of many approaching feet. Dear God! Mouthed and lion-paunched like this, what denial, endlessly reworded, could save him now?

The first officer who came in, nine millimeter at the ready, flak jacket on, saw naked Rod, all blood, lurch up from beside the horror of his human meal, and launch himself, fangs bared in a snarl. When the officer squeezed three rounds into Rod's forehead, it seemed a mercy to all concerned.

— CD

BOOK REVIEWS

Continued from page 104

fiction. Robert Payne is perhaps Gorman's most accomplished character yet, and one hopes to see much more of him in future stories and novels; if that will happen is only for Gorman and his publisher to know, but whether we ever see the likes of Payne again, one thing is for certain: *Blood Moon* is one of the three or four finest novels Gorman has ever produced, and that makes it very good, indeed.

— Gary A. Braunbeck

***White Shark*, by Peter Benchley, Random House, \$22.00 hc (ISBN 0-679-40356-6)**

It's rather unfortunate that Benchley chose to title this book *White Shark*. Most readers will immediately think that this is a sequel to, or a retelling of, his huge bestseller, *Jaws*. It isn't, even though a great white shark does play a secondary role in the story.

White Shark is the code name for a highly classified Nazi experiment during the final years of World War II. A research team headed by a brilliant, fanatical scientist creates the perfect amphibian warrior, a huge, water-breathing mutant with stainless steel claws for fingers, and stainless steel teeth implanted in its jaws.

The scientist packs his creation in a large, coffin-like container and escapes with it aboard one of the last operational U-boats. The plan is to join up with other escaped Nazis in South America and begin building a Fourth Reich. Fortunately, as the sub passes near the U.S. coast, she is caught by a Navy patrol fighter while recharging her batteries on the surface. Before they can defend themselves, the sub and everyone aboard her are sunk.

The story then switches to the present as we are introduced to Simon Chase, the chief of the Osprey Island Marine Institute near Long Island's North Shore. Chase's specialty is the study of sharks. When his twelve-year-old son, Max, comes to spend the summer, Chase is a bit apprehensive, but happily, there is an instant bond between them, and Max becomes a big help around the institute.

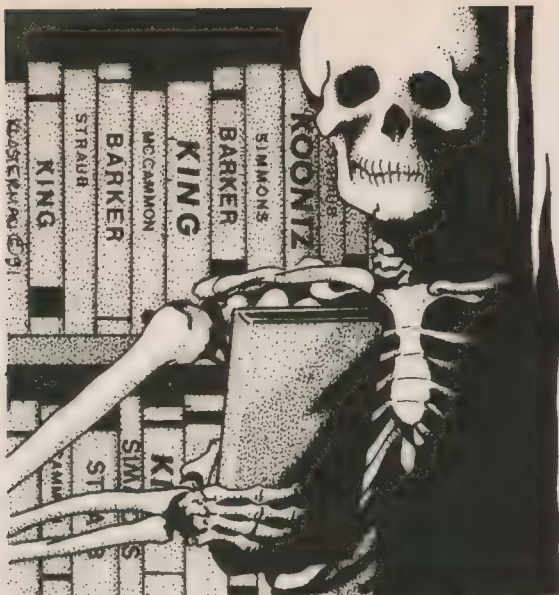
While tracking a pregnant great white, Chase finds a porpoise with a strange claw gash in its tail. He is also puzzled by unaccountably massive kills of sea life. When he later notices the same claw marks on the great white, Chase knows "there's something out there."

At about this time, Dr. Amanda Macy arrives at the institute with a group of highly trained sea lions. Her plan is to have the sea lions swim among the migrating whales with video cameras strapped to their backs. During a test run, one of the sea lions disappears and the recovered video camera shows a shocking scene of a steel-clawed hand attacking the sea lion. After a few additional bloody encounters at sea, the semi-human beast comes ashore intent on killing everyone at the institute.

Benchley's writing is fast-paced and convincing. When it comes to the ocean and its various forms of life, no other writer is even in the same league. Although in the broadest sense, *Jaws* could be considered a horror story, Benchley has now firmly planted himself in the horror genre with *White Shark*. From the descriptions in the story, I got the impression that the beast might look something like an albino version of "The Creature from the Black Lagoon."

White Shark probably won't reach the bestseller lists, but horror fans will definitely be missing out if they don't pick up a copy. With Benchley around, will it ever *really* be safe to go back into the water?

— Roman A. Ranieri



TYSON BLUE

NEEDFUL KINGS & OTHER THINGS

Even though I've already finished reading it, because it won't be out until almost time for our next issue, I can't tell you anything about King's new novel, *Insomnia*. I can't tell you how it takes place in Derry; how it ties in elements of *IT*, *Pet Sematary*, and the *Dark Tower* series, how it's one of King's best and most original novels in a long time — none of that, until next time. But in the meantime, there's this . . .

The Spring '94 issue of the legendary **Famous Monsters of Filmland** features the first mainstream publication of "The Killer," a short story written by King when he was 14 (according to the editorial foreword), and previously available only as part of the collection **People, Places & Things**, published by King when he was in high school and long, long LONG out of print. It seems King submitted the story to **Spacemen**, a companion magazine to **FM** back in the '60's, and it is finally being published. With the exception of "Jonathan and the Whitches," discussed a column or two back, this is the earliest piece of King writing released to the general public. For more information on the story, see my *The Unseen King*.

This issue of **FM** is extremely hard to find; you might check with

some of the dealers advertising in these pages to find a copy (I got mine from *Time Tunnel*). King-watcher Paul Taylor of Orlando, FL, sent this in, but we'd already seen it. Thanks, anyway.

King's name turned up on the May 2, 1994 edition of radio's **Howard Stern Show**. Stern, the Libertarian Party's former candidate for governor of the State of New York, was talking about his theory on how religions get started, and said something along the lines of, "You know Stephen King, one of the greatest writers of our time? His books are like fairytales. People read or hear fairy tales and start worshipping them, and that's how religions get started!"

If you caught the Rock Bottom Reminders at this year's ABA meeting in Anaheim, you already know that the band was joined by Bruce Springsteen for a number or two. If you missed it, you can catch the whole story in Dave Barry's daily column, which ran in my area on Tuesday, July 12, in the Rochester, NY, **Democrat & Chronicle**.

And if you missed out altogether, don't fret — you can travel back in time to catch King's speech at the National Press Club on October 19, 1993. The entire event, including one of the most excruciatingly

wooden introductions you'll ever sit through. It's worth the wait, however. King reminisces a bit about the beginnings of his career in keeping with the theme, "How'd a nice guy like you get a job like this?"

The tape will set you back \$45.00, and is available from Dave Hinchberger's *Overlook Connection*. Write P.O. Box 526, Woodstock, GA 30188 for details.

But for those who want to get your dose of King in person, you'll get your chance this fall, when King begins his tour of small, non-chain bookstores to promote *Insomnia*, the novel where you get to find out what Mike Hanlon's been up to lately. More details as we learn them, and thanks to King-watcher Susan Cogdell of Spartanburg, SC, for passing that along to us from **Locus**, Vol. 32, No. 6, June 1994.

And speaking of passing things along, don't forget to take part in my nifty new club, the King-Watchers of the World.

Judy Harold signs in from Orange, CT, once more — our first two-timer! — with an item from the April 18, 1994, issue of the New Haven **Register's** "Today's Woman" section, featuring an article entitled "Give a Writer a Home," about an adopt-an-author

program in the Hagaman Memorial Library in the East Haven home of King expert Stephen Spignesi. Of course, King is one of the adopted authors, and the article features a color photo of library aide Darleen Hood standing next to a life-size standee of King (her adopted author), originally released to promote the *Dark Tower* books.

Lori Zuccaro of Port Neches, TX, passes along **Cinefantastique's** series of four features on *The Stand*, all from the June 1994, issue (Volume 25, Number 3). This article features a number of photos, a few of which are from the miniseries, but most from stock. However, their coverage of the series is detailed and exhaustive, and you should check it out. And to answer your question, Lori, if you quote me, quote me by my full name, as well as the name, month, year, and issue number of the publication in which the quoted material appears (Lori says she has a King newsletter, and if she sends me a copy, I'll give you some more info).

Kingwatcher Robert Jents of El Sobrante, CA, passed along a copy of the **San Francisco Chronicle's** May 6, 1994, review of *The Stand*. It was a very negative review, and I'd recommend you not look it up unless you enjoy getting mad at bad reviewers. Let's alter the rules a little bit here, folks — don't send in negative reviews. No sense giving free publicity to bad publicity, if you catch my drift . . .

My favorite Kingwatch item so far comes from Shannon Steele of Apple Valley, CA (Y'know, you people in the other 49 states can join in, too!), who passed along a page from **EZ Ads**, a shopper. The ad features an antique and collectible store called — are you ready? — "Needful Things." I have to meet the guy who runs this place. I've passed this one along to King, who was not aware of it.

Judy Fenley of Aurora, CO,

sends in a television column by Dusty Saunders from the May 16, 1994 edition of the **Rocky Mountain News**. It concerns the upcoming four-hour miniseries based on "The Langoliers."

Some of you may want to check out **The Red Letter**, an unpretentious little horror newsletter put out by Greg Hotchkiss. It contains some fairly up-to-the-minute news about King, Barker, Koontz, and that vampire woman, among others. Write P.O. Box 352, Miamisburg, OH 45343, for details. Alright, this is already getting out of hand here, folks — this is a news column, not ad space; don't ask me to plug your newsletters, okay?

Lastly forthis go-round, Tammy J. Beaver of New Columbia, PA, checks in with King appearances in puzzles in two recent issues of **Games Magazine**, the

March and April 1994 issues.

So don't just sit there — join in the fun! No entry fee, no badges, no newsletter. What you do to join is spot a news item about Stephen King in a magazine, newspaper, TV show, anything. Send us a photocopy of the **entire article and the cover of the publication**, and send it to:

Kingwatch
c/o Tyson Blue
4064 County Line Road
Macedon, NY 14568

If you send an item we use, you'll get your name in this column. Submissions cannot be returned, and please don't send in articles from **Entertainment Weekly** — I read that regularly. Please note the new address this time around, and I mean it — stop asking me to plug newsletters —

OWN A PIECE OF STEPHEN KING'S HOUSE



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While you're waiting for Clive Barker's new novel, *Everville*, to come out — and that should be happening about the time you're reading this — you might want to track down the June 24-26, 1994, issue of *USA Weekend*, the Gannett newspapers' Sunday magazine section. They began their second annual Summer Fiction Series with "Animal Life," a new short story by Barker which tells the story of "a man and his dog in the rubble of post-earthquake L.A." The magazine is easy to spot — it features a cover photo of a smiling, goateed Barker on the cover. We'll have more on *Everville*, and hopefully a new Barker interview, in a future issue.

Dark Harvest continues their ongoing series of reprint mystery novels with *Blood Test*, the second and hardest to find of Jonathan Kellerman's Alex Delaware novels.

Kellerman's renowned psychologist-sleuth finds himself this time on the trail of a young boy kidnapped from a cancer ward before his vitally-needed treatments are finished. As he races to beat the doomsday clock, he encounters a cult full of sinister sexual deviates, two growers of arcane plants, a nubile nymphomaniac and enough action to satisfy any mystery fan.

An added treat to this edition is an introduction by Dean Koontz, "Mr. Bizarro," which may also be found in *The Dean Koontz Companion*, which we mentioned last column.

In *Heat*, Stuart Woods introduces us to Jesse Warden, a former DEA agent doing time in a Federal pen for a crime he didn't commit. Given a last chance to redeem himself by a man he hates, Warden finds himself headed for a remote mountain community in Idaho, where his mission is to infiltrate a religious cult which is rumored to

be in the arms business. Two agents have already vanished working on the case.

Warden soon finds himself seduced by his beautiful, widowed landlady (I got screwed by my landlord recently, too, but it sounds like Warden had a better time), and soon worms his way into the innermost recesses of the cult. All of this leads up to an explosive climax which makes for one of Woods' best thrillers in some time. This is a very quick summer read from an author who always delivers.

Gary Raisor's innovative vampire novel, *Less Than Human*, is finally available in its long-awaited hardcover edition from Dave Hinchberger's *Overlook Connection Press*. The novel features a fabulous cover painting by Guy Aitchison, and as you probably know, there is also a super-deluxe edition available which comes in a real coffin. Call Dave at 404-926-1762 for more info.

NOW AVAILABLE FROM EURO-SHADES:

Stefan Grabinski's THE DARK DOMAIN

Stefan Grabinski (1887-1936). The Polish Poe. Evocative atmosphere, chilling psychological perceptiveness, a surprising dose of sexuality. His work previously unavailable in English translation. Now Dedalus, England's premier publisher of decadent and supernatural fiction, has released the first English collection of Grabinski's stories, *THE DARK DOMAIN*. This quality paperbound book will be followed by other Grabinski collections. And the reviews are in! "Grabinski's prose will appeal to those who admire the work of Poe, Aickman and Clark Ashton Smith." (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*) "A highly accomplished writer whose work certainly deserves to be firmly established within the canon of supernatural fiction greats." (*Necrofile*) "Moody, atmospheric tales...whose sensibility to the psychological effects of horror was well in advance of the author's time." (*Science Fiction Chronicle*) "The appeal of these stories is surely a measure of their successful translation." (*NY Review of Science Fiction*) "This collection is destined to be a classic and belongs on the shelf alongside the likes of Poe and Lovecraft.... [The] translation of this remarkable and relatively unknown writer is superb." (*Elegia*)

THE DARK DOMAIN can now be ordered from Euro-Shades, P.O. Box 2398, New York, NY 10009. \$10.95 plus \$3 postage and handling. (NY State residents please add 8.25% tax.)

* Euro-Shades carries other Dedalus titles, including their Decadence and Fantasy line. We also carry other books, as well as selected videos and import soundtracks (such as Lucio Fulci's Horror and Thriller CD). Lists free with book order, or send a SASE. *

THE MAN WHO LIKED POE

DAN PEREZ

DAN PEREZ is a well-respected author of many horror short stories and a fine non-fiction writer as well. The following story marks his second publication within these pages.

It was a squalid little bar. The floor was hard-packed dirt, and the walls were corrugated tin, searing hot to the touch from the tropical sun. The bar and tables had been cobbled together with plywood, and the chairs were rickety and scratched. Roaches scuttled across the shelves and flies buzzed through the humid air. The smell of body odor permeated the place, mixed with the occasional whiff of sewage and old urine.

Still, it seemed popular. A guitarist and drummer played in one corner and sweat-soaked people shuffled on the dirt dance floor or crowded around the bar, drinking warm beer from unlabeled bottles. They spoke in hushed Creole, turning and pointing at the solitary white man sitting at a table in the corner opposite the band, reading from a small book.

Martin Best glanced up, watching them turn away, laughing to themselves. Then, removing his hat, he dabbed at his balding head with a handkerchief before returning to his reading. He sensed someone beside him and looked up again. The large man's skin was the rich brown-black color of molasses. The planes of his wide, flat face were stern, yet there was a hint of sly gaiety about the eyes. He wore an earring with a single red feather in his left ear, a gold Rolex wristwatch, faded jeans and an Adidas T-shirt.

"You Mr. Best?" he said, his voice a moody baritone.

"Mr. Chessault?" Martin said, standing.

"They call me Chess," he said simply, pronouncing it *shess*. He sat and regarded Martin for a long moment.

"Would you like a drink?"

"I don't drink on Wednesdays," Chess replied.

"Nothing? Not even water?"

"I don't drink on Wednesdays." Chess took a deep breath and gazed into Martin's eyes. "I'm told you're wanting some *poudre*."

"I'm sorry?"

"Some powder."

Best swallowed and glanced around. Chess smiled for the first time. "Don't you worry, Mr. Best; nobody here gonna say nothing about nothing. We can talk free like the wind here. What you reading there?"

"It's Poe. Edgar Allan Poe."

Chess smiled again. "Quoth the raven, nevermore."

Martin smiled back, surprised. "Yes, that's it. You've read him, then?"

"Oh yeah. I'm one of those black people who reads."

Martin took a sip of his beer. "I didn't mean—"

"It's all right, Mr. Best. It's a habit of mine, making people uncomfortable. Even if they've got no cause to be so."

Best nodded, definitely feeling uncomfortable. He cleared his throat. "You mentioned some powder."

Chess nodded, staring intently. "It's costly, you see. Much more so than the purest snow white."

"Snow white?"

"Cocaine, Mr. Best. This powder is authentic, you see. With it you conjure up the *zombi cadavre*: the dead who walk. I don't play no games with no one—don't have no time for that."

"How much will it cost?"

"You can afford it, I know. I hear you bought the old fort."

Best nodded. "Yes. It's very picturesque."

"My ancestors might not have thought as much when they passed by it in chains," Chess said, raising a bushy eyebrow. "And yet it brings the tourists now."

"How much do you want?"

"Five hundred thousand American dollars."

Martin smiled. To the owner of America's fastest growing software company, it was almost pocket change. Still, in a Third World country, the initial asking price was considered to be the starting point for bargaining. "I'll give you three hundred thousand."

Chess' eyes grew cold. "I'm a *houngan*, Mr. Best. Not some vendor on the street. I told you: I don't no play no games with no one." He moved to stand.

"All right, all right, five hundred thousand, like you said."

Chess nodded, settling in his seat again. "That's much better."

"I can get the money in a couple of days."

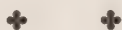
"I'll need a bit longer to make the powder. It must be fresh, you see. And there are rituals to invoke the *loas*."

"So, when do we meet again?"

"Two weeks," said Chess. He glanced at the book again. "What of Mr. Poe's are you reading today?"

"*Descent into the Maelstrom*."

Chess smiled, then stood and walked out of the bar.



"Two weeks, two months," Hannah said, smearing sunblock on her cleavage. "I don't care how long we stay. I like it down here."

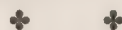
Martin smiled and sipped his tequila sunrise. He had expected resistance. "I'm glad you like it here," he said.

"I can shop, scuba dive, sightsee, do lots of things," she said. "I won't be bored."

"Good," Martin replied. "I've got business to attend to, as I said, so you'll be on your own most of the time."

"I'm sure I'll find ways to entertain myself," Hannah said casually, stretching out on the lounge chair.

Uh-huh, thought Martin, sipping at his drink and gazing at her perfect body stretched out before him. Perfect legs, perfect face, perfect *everything*. That's just the problem, he thought. Hannah entertaining herself with that perfect body, his money and all those other men. But not much longer. There wouldn't be any divorce: no alimony for Hannah Best, the trophy wife, the gold digger, ice-maiden to her husband and whore to all the suntanned pretty boys. Martin grinned as he thought of what Hannah *was* going to get. He drained his drink, listened to the sound of surf on the hotel's private beach and smiled again. Two weeks.

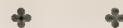


Martin ambled along the crumbling ramparts of the old Spanish fort. It stood on a bluff overlooking the electric blue waters of the bay. A fresh breeze whistled through the branches of the twisted trees nearby, carrying the smell of smoke from the charcoal makers' ovens near the village.

Martin surveyed the weed-studded stonework. It's a perfect place, he thought. Down to the last detail.

He glanced at his watch. He had an hour to kill. He opened his book and read the first line of the story aloud: "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon

insult, I vowed revenge." He laughed, then continued to read the story—his favorite of late—until the time for his meeting came.



Chess sat waiting for him as he walked into the seedy village bar. Martin walked over to the table.

"Ah, Mr. Best," said Chess. "The man who likes Poe."

Martin smiled and sat down. He placed his aluminum briefcase on the table and slid it across to Chess, feeling like he was making a drug deal. Which, of course, he was.

"Such an attractive carrying-case," said Chess as he opened it, keeping the back to Martin and any onlookers. "But the contents are far more attractive." He closed the case and reached into his shirt pocket. He removed a tiny glass vial, filled with what appeared to be fine gunpowder, and handed it to Martin.

"This is all I need?"

Chess nodded, staring at him.

"Mind if I ask what's in it?"

"A variety of things. Dried juice from the *bouga* toad. Ground millipede and tarantula. Skin of the white tree frog. Essence of puffer fishes. Bones of the dead. And many other things with names you don't know. Put the powder into food or rub it into an open wound. First effects come in an hour, and the full effect in two hours. The *zombi cadavre* don't drink and it don't eat. No need for such things. She will follow your orders. They make very fine slaves."

"You said 'she,'" Martin said, suspicion prickling along his spine.

Chess smiled. "Did I? Fancy that, now."

Martin stared into Chess' dark eyes, trying not to let his agitation show through. "I don't like being trifled with, either," he said.

"I'm certain you don't," said Chess, his smile fading away. "Have I answered all your questions about the *poudre*, then?"

Martin glanced at the black powder in the vial. "Do I need to say anything?" he asked. "Do anything? I mean, do I really have to believe in this?"

Chess laughed, a low rumbling sound in his chest. "Say and do what you like. And you have got it backwards, Mr. Best." Chess leaned across the table toward him. "It don't work because people believe. People believe *because* it works, you see.

"And now," he said, leaning back and placing his hand on the aluminum case, "Our business is concluded."

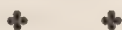
Martin eyed the vial, rolling it in his fingers. *What if he's duping me?* he thought.

Chess tilted his head disapprovingly. "These transactions must be based on *trust*, Mr. Best." He

patted the case. "Could these be counterfeit bills? I have no way to know. But I trust you."

Martin nodded. "Of course."

Chess stood. "Good-bye, Mr. Best."



Martin knew Hannah had been with another man that afternoon—he could smell cheap, musky cologne on her. So careless, he thought. Her breath smelled of *clairin*, the colorless local rum. She sat across the table from him in their hotel room, blonde curls draped over her tanned shoulders, giggling at some private joke as they started to eat their room service dinner.

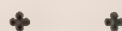
"What is this stuff?" she asked, still giggling. She speared a piece of blackened meat with her fork and sniffed it.

"Haitian specialty," he said. "They rub the pork with the spices, deep fry it for a few seconds, then dredge it in more spices and grill it over charcoal. Try it."

She ate a piece. "Not bad," she said, still chewing it. "Spicy. Funny aftertaste, though."

Martin nodded, chewing a mouthful from his plate. "Yeah, it is a bit odd, isn't it?" he said. "Still, well worth trying, huh?"

"I guess," she said, continuing to eat.



As she came in from her shower, a towel wrapped around her, Hannah said, "Marty, I don't feel so good."

Martin looked up from his reading. "What's wrong?"

"I feel dizzy, and kind of tingly in my arms and legs. The tips of my fingers are a little numb."

"You're pale, too," he said, standing up. He resisted a sudden urge to smile. "Why don't you get into bed, honey? I'll call the hotel doctor."

Martin pretended to call the doctor from the next room, then settled down in a chair and read for a while longer. From the next room, he heard her calling for him, but her voice grew shallower and more feeble. After she had been silent for a while, he went back into the room and stood in front of the bed.

Hannah had thrown off the sheets, but now she lay motionless, the pallor of her skin tinged blue. Drenched in sweat, she showed no sign of life. Then her eyes moved sluggishly, focusing on him, and Martin saw the fear in them.

Martin sat beside her on the bed. He touched the moist skin of her neck. It felt unnaturally cool, and he couldn't detect a pulse. He tugged at the towel and it came open. Her nipples were blue.

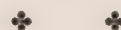
Martin leaned close to her ear. "You can hear me, can't you?" he said. "If you can hear me, blink your

eyes."

Her eyelids slowly closed, then opened again.

"Hannah, your days as a party girl are over," he said. "We're going to go for a little walk down to the fort tonight. I've got another surprise for you. The fort will be pretty in the moonlight, don't you think?"

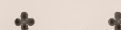
She didn't answer. He stood and went to the dresser. Rummaging through it, he pulled out jeans, a long-sleeved shirt and a scarf. He tossed the clothing on the bed near her feet. "Get dressed," he said.



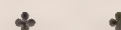
The near-total darkness hummed with mosquitos and biting flies. Martin slapped at his face and neck, cursing himself for not bringing any insect repellent. He shone the flashlight down the path to the fort, and then behind. He saw Hannah walking slowly behind him, following as he had commanded her. "Almost there," he said, swinging the light back to the path. He laughed, in spite of the bugs assaulting him.

They went down into the heart of the ruins, following a spiral stairway down to the catacombs beneath the fort. A chain stretched across the foot of the stairs, and from it depended a sign that said *DANGER* in English and Creole. Martin ducked under the chain and told Hannah to, as well. Martin heard her footsteps behind him as he navigated the maze of stone corridors. Finally he came to a small alcove set into a stone wall. A large stack of bricks sat next to it, along with a wheelbarrow, bags of cement and sand, several white plastic buckets of water, a hoe and a hand trowel.

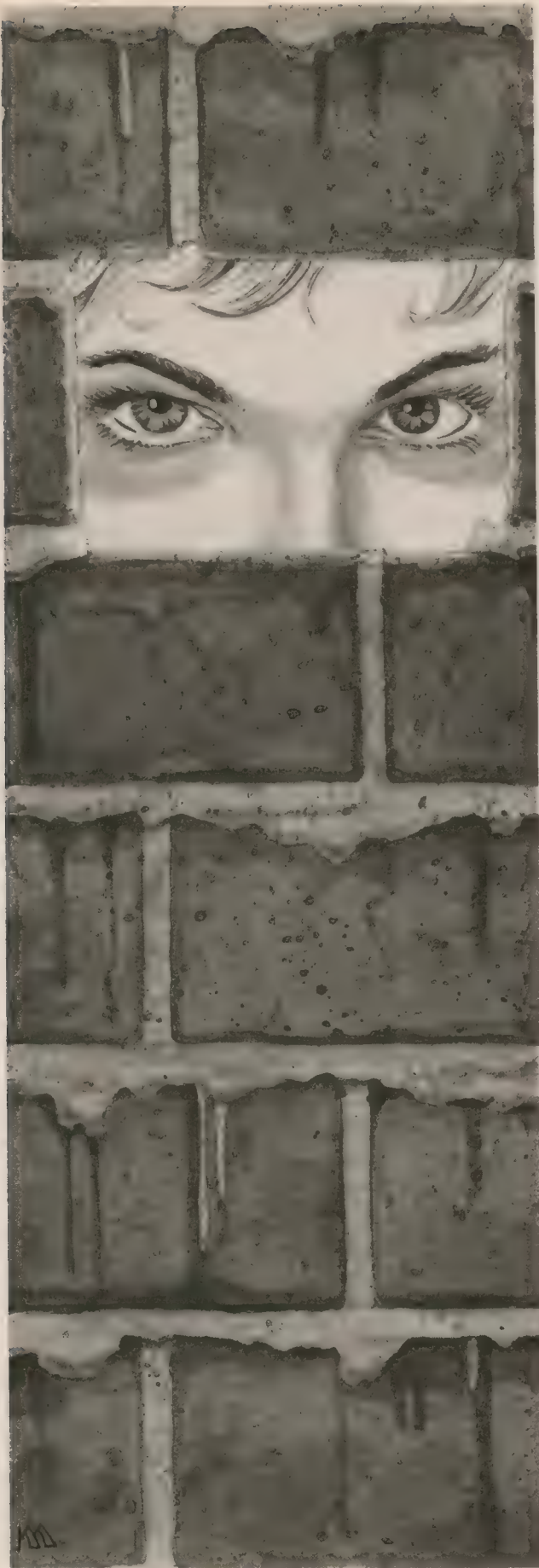
"*The Cask of Amontillado*," Hannah!" Martin said, laughing again. "But with a little twist. You won't suffocate. You won't die of thirst or starvation. You'll occupy this little niche of Spanish history for a long, long time. Conscious for every second, every hour, every month. Plenty of time to think." He bent and tore the sack of cement open. "But even the thinking will get boring after a few months, I'd guess. Too bad."



Hannah stood motionless in the alcove, her frightened eyes fixed on the tier Martin had just begun. The wall was up to her waist. Martin paused to wipe the sweat from his face, then bent to scoop up a trowel full of concrete from the wheelbarrow. He heard a loud smack, felt a bright flash of pain, and then darkness enfolded him.



Martin awoke, a shifting cloud of pain trapped in his skull. He heard a distant scraping sound, and tried to move, but the pain throbbed worse, and he nearly



fainted. He lay slumped, gasping until it ebbed. He recognized the scraping sound as that of a trowel against brick, and he heard a voice.

"Awake in there, Mr. Best?"

Martin looked up at the sound of the voice and saw a thin bar of light several feet above him. He groped in the darkness, ignoring the searing pain in his head, and pushed himself to a sitting position. Reaching out, his fingertips touched the cool stone walls at his back and sides, and the fresh masonry in front of him. Fear churned in him and he tried to stand up, but a swirling dizziness caused him to slump down again. "Please don't do this," he cried out.

"It's a cruel thing you were going to do to her, Mr. Best," Chess called through the opening at the top of the alcove. "But your mistake was to forget that there are men in this world much better acquainted with cruelty and scheming. Did you think I wouldn't be curious about why you wanted the *poudre*? Secrets are hard to keep in this country, Mr. Best. Especially when you know its ways."

"Please," Martin called out, "I can give you money—lots more money."

"You've given me all I need. I'm a rich man. Besides, my needs are simple: a little food, a little *clairin*, and this fine white *zombi* to do whatever I desire. I've taken a liking to her, you see. Such pretty blonde hair."

Martin looked up and saw that the last course was almost completed. "For the love of God, don't!"

Rumbling laughter echoed in the catacombs. "Was it Fortunato who said that? 'For the love of God, Montresor!' Check in your shirt pocket, Mr. Best."

Confused, Martin put a trembling hand to his pocket, felt a small cylindrical object and withdrew it.

"I gave you a potion to make you weak until this mortar dries," said Chess. "That bottle you've got contains more *poudre*. Take it and you'll remain as you intended your wife to. But then there's a chance someone—maybe months, maybe years from now—will discover you. Or don't take it, and you'll die after a few days."

Martin screamed as loud as he could. "LET ME OUT OF HERE!" His mind reeled and he coughed fitfully. The coughing lapsed into sobs.

One brick remained. Over the snuffling sound of his crying, Martin heard Chess' voice again. "Seal it on up, now, my lovely Hannah. Mr. Best has much to think about."

— CD



KATHRYN
PTACEK

ANTHOLOGY ATTIC

In this installment we sham-
ble along with the walking dead.

Yes, this column is on zombie
anthologies.

Zombies arrived on the hor-
ror scene rather late, in compari-
son to other traditional bad guys,
such as ghosts, vampires and were-
wolves (not to mention the psy-
chotic killer). Before George
Romero's movie, *Night of the Living
Dead*, you didn't see much cine-
matic zombism. There was Val
Lewton's *I Walked With A Zombie*, a
neat little classic of traditional un-
dead, and *Zombies on Broadway*,
which proved to be a tremendous
disappointment to me—I expected
sort of high-kickin' undead Rock-
ettes, which would have been fun.
Then Romero's films came out,
and they were immediately fol-
lowed by dozens of imitations,
most of them truly forgettable.
And then slowly the zombie be-
came more of a standard in horror
fiction—not only the traditional
kind, but the “new” Romeroesque
one.

And now more and more you
see the zombie in short fiction.
You might think that three books
of zombies (not counting the en-
tire Skipp and Spector *Dead* series)
is a lot, but compare that to, say,
vampire fiction. A mere drop in
the bucket of blood, as it were.

So, be sure your front door is

bolted and the lights are on as you
read these books, and remember:
aim for the brain.

* *

[Note: This review originally ap-
peared in *Anthology Attic* #5; I've
trimmed it a bit for this column.]

Still Dead: Book of the Dead II (John
Skipp and Craig Spector, editors;
Bantam Books; 320 pages; \$4.99;
ISBN 0-553-29839-9).

I read the first volume that
Skipp and Spector edited, *Book of
the Dead*, and thought it was pretty
much standard fare. So when I
came to *Still Dead*, I was pleased—
there was a refreshing difference.
The stories were just plain better
than those in the earlier volume.

You might expect a certain
amount of gore, say, on a scale of
one to ten, maybe a fifty-seven or
so. I think you would be surprised.
I was. There is gore, yes; I mean,
we're talking reanimated corpses
who stuff the intestines of the liv-
ing down their gullets—and that's
just as an hors d'oeuvre. But
there's a lot more here.

The zombies, as defined by
the [George Romero *Living Dead*]
movies, don't exhibit intelligence
or any other personality trait from
their previous lives. Thus they are
really nothing more than mindless

killing and eating machines. Most
of the stories here are not from the
point-of-view of the zombies—this
would have been real dull real
fast—but from those humans facing
the zombie menace. There also is
a vague religious undertone
throughout this sub-genre—many
religions have the tenet of the dead
coming to life at the end of the
world; it's just that no one ever said
what shape those dearly departed
would be in when they revived (or
is that reanimated; well, that's a
whole 'nother series of films).
With this anthology, we know.

“The Old Man and the Dead”
by Mort Castle involves a Famous
Writer Long Dead (hint: think
white beard, hunter, macho type).
The story is set up in vignettes,
mostly in the past, and written in
an almost brusque style, and I re-
ally liked it and wished it had been
a lot longer.

Ms. Geiss, the elementary
schoolteacher of Dan Simmons’
“This Year's Class Picture” has her
rules, her ways of doing things in
her classroom, and she's done
them just that way for decades
now, and just because all her stu-
dents are zombies now isn't going
to disrupt her schedule. What
could have been a silly idea quickly
became poignant, thanks to Sim-
mons' capable touch.

There's dark humor in “Night

of the Living Dead Bingo Women" by Simon McCaffery. Here the zombies aren't as threatening as in other tales (because of something that happened to the protagonist); it's brief and fun.

In a few short years Elizabeth Massie has established herself as a writer of weird stories, stories that are very much Southern Gothic, and in "Abed," Massie has written another gut-wrencher. It's about Meggie, a young woman locked in her bedroom by her mother-in-law, and—No, I can't go on; any more detail will spoil it for you. Read it, though, and be warned: this is *strong*, and not for the reasons you think.

In "Passion Play" Nancy Holder takes a look at the famous Obergammern Passion Play, and what happens to one courageous priest who stands alone after the zombies have come. It is a well thought out and finely executed piece.

Other contributors include: Chan McConnell, Nancy A. Collins, K. W. Jeter, Glen Vasey, John Skipp and Craig Spector, Gahan Wilson, Kathe Koja, Gregory Nicoll, Douglas Morningstar and Maxwell Hart, J. S. Russell, Roberta Lannes, Poppy Z. Brite, Brooks Carruthers, Douglas E. Winter.

* *

The Ultimate Zombie (Byron Preiss and John Betancourt, editors; Dell, 1993; 389 pages; \$11.95; ISBN 0-440-50534-8).

One of the things I found most interesting about this book—beyond the stories, which are overall quite good—is this little box in the lower right hand corner of the copyright page and the type within it: "This book is a work of fiction. It does not endorse or imply any endorsement of witchcraft or any of the content herein." I was truly astounded. Who believes that? It is, after all, *fiction* (check your dictionary). And do publishers and

editors see the need to put something like this into a book now? Will all books of speculative fiction (and this includes fantasy and horror and sf and everything in between) have to be so tagged from now on? Isn't this rather tantamount to putting a big red A on someone's chest—or a yellow star—on someone's clothing? Isn't this a way of setting something different aside, of making it seem . . . not right? Horror and fantasy (and related topics) are in dire danger—many novels in the fields are banned in schools, in libraries, and even more are coming under fire by self-appointed demagogues. There is something afoot here, folks (that's C-E-N-S-O-R-S-H-I-P) and it's not at all pleasant. We're going to see some rough times ahead. Censorship is here, and it's getting worse. Let me know what you think. I'm interested in hearing what you have to say.

I continue to really like S.P. Somtow's short fiction and "Though I Walk Through The Valley" is no exception. This is an on-the-edge tale of child abuse and zombies that really packs a punch.

Robert Silverberg's "Passengers" is a truly frightening variation on zombies. It's set a bit in the future, and concerns what happens when an alien presence decides to "ride" Earth folks; yeah, the invasion, but not just of world, but mind and body, the ultimate planetary rape.

Kevin J. Anderson offers the compelling tale of Clancy Tucker and the coffins of his parents in the historical "Bringing The Family," while in "Corporate Takeover" Matthew J. Costello serves us a wry parable of business today—with a certain twist.

In an extremely well-done "Red Angels," set in Haiti, Karen Haber examines the relationship of art and zombism (not, a form of cubism, by the way). F. A. McMahen's solid "House of Lazarus" is a look at something a bit different—

sort of a half-way house for zombies. In a memorable "The Third Dead Body" Nina Kiriki Hoffman shows us that love—and something else—prove just as strong after death.

Other contributors include Anne Rice, Geoffrey A. Landis, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Alan Rodgers, Larry Tritten, John Brunner, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Harlan Ellison, Don D'Amassa, A. R. Moran, Rick Hautala, Brian Hodge and William Relling Jr., D. F. Lewis, Robert Weinberg, Lionel Fenn, Gene Wolfe.

* *

The Mammoth Book of Zombies (Stephen Jones, editor; Robinson Publishing, 1993; 518 pages; £5.99; 1-85487-228-1).

Overall, I liked this anthology; there were some clinkers, of course, but it was a nice overview of zombies—you name the kind, it was there.

Clive Barker provides a more than slightly sardonic look at the theatre world in "Sex, Death and Starshine." What happens when the leading lady, who's alive, is as wooden in performance as, say, a zombie. Where there's a way, there's a will, so to speak. "Sticks" by Karl Edward Wagner is an eerie tale of an artist who goes rambling through the woods—and what he finds there. I don't think you'll soon forget this one.

Lisa Tuttle's "Treading the Maze" is very much traditional English horror (from an American writer, even)—it's quiet and just short of creeps up on you, and isn't something you forget soon. It's the story of Amy and Phil who stay at a country inn, and what Amy sees at night when she looks out the window. Christopher Fowler's "Night After Night of the Living Dead" is told from the point of the view of a kid, and it's to the point and really great.

David Sutton's "Clinically

Dead" is about a man whose mother is in the hospital, and each time he visits, he finds she's worsened. This story is good and effective.

"Mission to Margal" by Hugh B. Cave tells the story of American Nurse Kay Gilbert, determined to return the little girl that's been in her care to her village—despite the many obstacles that seem to be springing up. This is one of the more traditional zombie stories in the anthology, but don't let that you fool you—it's well-written and well-told. Cave knows this area, too (the story takes place in Haiti); he's lived there and in Jamaica, and the story has a real sense of *place*.

Mamma Lansdale's Youngest Boy, Joe R., doesn't think like you or me. Which is, I suppose, why he

is Joe R. Lansdale and we're not. The anthology ends with "On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert with Dead Folks," a truly unique story about a bounty hunter, and zombies (of course), and sexy nuns (yes), and a whole lot more. It is vintage Joe R. Lansdale, which means it's weird and unpredictable and indelible like a tattoo. I kept thinking, wow, wouldn't this make a really wacky and weird movie? Now, just who would I cast in the roles? Read it, and see what you think.

Other contributors include: Ramsey Campbell, Manly Wade Wellman, R. Chetwynd-Hayes, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles L. Grant, Basil Copper, M. R. James, Nicholas Royle, Brian Lumley, H. P. Lovecraft, David Riley, Graham

Masterton, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Les Daniels, Michael Marshall Smith, Peter Tremayne, Dennis Etchison, Robert Bloch, Kim New-
man.

* *

An update from an earlier column: Karl Edward Wagner's anthology series, *The Year's Best Horror* is not dead, as reported, but very much alive, and he even has the new contract to prove it.

* *

That's all for now. The next column will be on . . . maybe erotica horror? Keep reading.

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CD REVIEWS

BOOKS, VIDEOS, SOFTWARE...

***Shoedog*, by George P. Pelecanos, St. Martin's Press, May 1994, 200 pp., \$19.95, hc, ISBN 0-312-11061-8**

Shoedog is one of the best examples of noir I've come across in a long time, ranking right up there alongside the works of Jim Thompson and Cornell Woolrich. It's also, in its own way, much darker and horrific than a majority of the horror fiction being published today. At last, a book which wholeheartedly embraces what I believe is the true essence of horror: the feeling that anything can happen, and when it does it will probably be bad.

Shoedog tells the story of a drifter named Constantine who, while hitchhiking, gets picked up by a grizzled old man named Polk who, it turns out, robs liquor stores every so often at the behest of a man named Grimes. Constantine, who lives life from day to day, and who has an obsession of sorts with danger (he finds peace from being in tense situations), joins Polk in Grimes' latest heist, a decision which forever changes all of their lives.

Spot-on characterization, crisp dialogue, tight plotting, and an overall tone as dark as a moonless night, *Shoedog* is a book well worth checking out.

Recommended.

—Mike Baker

***The Fearmakers*, edited by John McCarty, St. Martin's Press, November 1994, 192 pp., tpb, ISBN 0-312-11272-6**

Subtitled "The Screen's Directorial Masters of Suspense and Terror," *The Fearmakers* looks at twenty film-

makers "...whose contributions to and influence upon the genre in terms of theme, style, and technical and other innovations remains significant." They're presented in chronological order, starting with Tod Browning (who directed his first feature length film, *Jim Bludso*, in 1915) and ending with Stuart Gordon (who got his start with *Re-Animator* in 1985).

Each director is covered in a separate in-depth essay, seven of which were written by McCarty (the man behind the *Splatter Movie Guide, Volumes I & II*, as well as many other film books). Other contributors include John Brent, Raymond G. Cabana Jr., Michael J. Collins, Walter L. Gay, Bruce G. Hallenback and Ken Hanke. McCarty's essays are the best of the lot, being both informative, entertaining and, surprise, open-minded as well; he isn't afraid to point out that while some of his subject's films were classics, others weren't. Hallenback, Collins and Gay share that sentiment to different degrees as well, and their essays are also enjoyable. Cabana's essay on Roland West is packed with facts about the man and his work, but there's an oddly obsessive air about it; he comes across as too enamored with his subject to present things in an unbiased manner. The same holds true with Brent's essay on Brian DePalma. Brent spends far too much space attempting to defend DePalma's tendency to swipe shots and techniques from other directors. Then there's Hanke, who really needs to lighten up a bit. His essays on Cronenberg and Polanski are readable (if a bit on the biased side). Skip the one on James Whale, though, as it is

filled with ramblings about the (perceived) homosexual themes in Whale's film work. It's scary, but in all the wrong ways.

Each essay is followed by a detailed filmography of that person's career, covering not only the feature films they directed, but anything else film-related they may have been involved with. For example, the two-reelers (most of which are now lost) that Tod Browning directed are listed, as are Jack Arnold's acting credits (he worked for 14 years as an actor before learning filmmaking during his WWII stint in the U.S. Signal Corps). As all good filmbooks should be, *The Fearmakers* is packed full of photos, including many rarities from private collections.

Entertaining and informative, *The Fearmakers* is a must-have item for any horror film fan's reference shelf.

Recommended.

—Mike Baker

***Some of Your Blood*, by Theodore Sturgeon, Carroll & Graf, June 1994, 143 pp., \$3.95, pb, ISBN 0-7867-0131-X**

Originally published in 1961, and considered quite controversial at the time because of its handling of previously taboo subject matter, this short novel is just as effective today.

The story is told entirely in journal entries, letters, and interviews, a style which, while simple in appearance, is actually quite difficult to effectively pull off. Sturgeon does it though, spinning the tale of George Smith, a young man with a fondness for hunt-

ing, and blood. What really makes this story great is that there's obviously something wrong with George—he's not what anyone would consider a normal person—yet you can't help but be fascinated by, and even feel sorry for, him. He may be a monster, but he's a human one, with wants and needs all his own, warped though they may be.

What I enjoyed the most about *Some of Your Blood* is that it forces you to think, as opposed to the common literary practice, one which I find annoying, insulting and generally demeaning, of explaining everything to the reader. Since the various narratives are written in the first person, they're of course biased in one way or another, and it's ultimately up to you to figure out what is what. This bias is especially true with George; there isn't anything openly horrific about what he writes, but the more you think about it, the deeper you delve into the words behind the words, the creepier it gets.

If your only exposure to *Some of Your Blood* up until now has been reading about how great it is in genre overviews like Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy of this newly-released edition, part of Carroll & Graf's Masters of Science Fiction series. This is one case where all that praise is justly-deserved.

Recommended.

—Mike Baker

Grave Markings, by Michael A. Arnzen, Dell/Abyss, Nov. 1994, 384 pp., \$4.99 pb (ISBN 0-440-21339-8)

Tattoos are fascinating. Most everyone would agree, I think. If you see someone with a tattoo, do you not crane your neck as far (and inconspicuously) as possible to check it out? If you don't have a tattoo yourself, then you wonder what would lead someone to permanently imprint a design on his/her flesh. If you *do* have a tattoo, then you can't help but want to compare yours to others' for quality, clarity, and design. There is something very basic about a tattoo, something primal and self-identifying. Looking at someone's tattoo is like witnessing a confession to some deeply intimate side of the person you wouldn't normally come to know in casual acquaintance.

Michael A. Arnzen, in his first novel *Grave Markings*, takes tattooing to an extreme. It is more than a slogan or a design, it is artwork. More than that even, it is a style of life and living, a philosophy. Left to the hands of a maniac, tattooing becomes a mode of psychological domination and terror.

The central action of *Grave Markings* revolves around the Tattoo Killer, a multiple murderer who has the unsavory habit of tattooing every inch of his victims with scenes of perverse and demented violence and sex. A journalist, a detective, and a tattoo artist team up to try and solve the crimes. At first it seems like it will be easy, because the killer always *signs* his work. Of course, the job turns out to be more involved; the murderer uses a code to identify himself, and there doesn't seem to be any link between his victims. Bodies, and tattoos, begin to stack up.

Grave Markings is a vision of dementia, a train ride on eggshell tracks. The killer's mental state deteriorates smoothly, as he is on a mission he understands. The good guys, the ones who are searching for the Tattoo Killer, frazzle in rickety clumps because they really *don't* know, until near the end, what the underlying motivation is for the murders. The juxtaposition is intimidating and effective as it reveals the damage that can occur while ordered "normal" minds rely initially on real-world logic to first understand, then predict, seemingly unreasoned moves.

Michael A. Arnzen is a young, twenty-something writer who, whether he realizes it or not, is building expectations in his readers for innovation and the honest examination of psyche. He has done this through his imaginative short stories (see his collection, *Needles and Sins*, published by Dark Regions Press in 1993), and he continues along the same path with *Grave Markings*. There is good reason to believe Arnzen will be writing breathtaking horror for a long time. I can say this with confidence because I heard him read an excerpt from his next novel at the World Horror Convention last March in Phoenix. It was stunning.

For now we have *Grave Markings*. Pick up a copy and you'll see what I have been talking about. It is certainly one of the highlights in horror fiction this year.

—Wayne Edwards

Revenant, by Melanie Tem, Dell/Abyss, Sept. 1994, 400 pp., \$4.99 pb (ISBN 0-440-21503-X)

Melanie Tem has achieved much well-justified success. She won the Bram Stoker Award (in the First Novel category) for *Prodigal* (Dell/Abyss 1991), received high critical acclaim for her excellent werewolf novel *Wilding* (Dell/Abyss 1992), and *Making Love* (Dell/Abyss 1993), written with Nancy Holder, went into a second printing only a month after its initial release. And—perhaps the greatest compliment a paperback original can receive—all three of these books are still in print. She must be doing something right.

She is. In *Wilding*, she provided an unusual perspective on lycanthropic mythology by casting the beasts as a clan of females. In *Making Love*, she and Nancy Holder dealt with the creationist underpinnings of the basic *Frankenstein* story, building on the fundamental premise with philosophical questions similar to Shelley's. Tem and Holder's book, however, is in many ways more disturbing and terrifying than the original. Among her talents, then, we can list the modernizing of classic tales, avoiding redundancy through the application of unique perspective. Tem is expert at this.

Her latest book is called *Revenant*, and at its core it is a ghost story. The overriding difference between her ghosts and traditional haunters is their creation. Tem's ghosts are not wrought solely from sudden, early, or violent death; indeed, some of the ghosts are manifestations of people not yet deceased, but somehow changed so greatly that their living selves only faintly resemble the persons they once were. The ghosts are bound to the earth by their surviving loved ones whose grief will not let them pass. It is the sorrow and grief of the living which bridge the gap to the spiritual.

The novel is populated by intriguing characters who find themselves in extraordinary, but entirely believable, situations. For instance, a man is haunted by the image of his sister whom he used to have sex with when she was small. When she got old enough to say no, he lost the child he had loved and so he grieved for her. Even though he is villainous, his pain is real and strong enough to produce the vision of what he can no longer

have. The haunting does not occur out of a need for revenge on the part of the ghost, but rather the inability of the living to deal with what is for him a crisis. Another character misses the way her husband used to be before he fell prey to Alzheimer's disease. She no longer knows her husband, he has become so different, and she does not want to be with him any longer. It is the image of him the way he used to be, the ghost of that lost self, which haunts her. All of the ghosts are drawn to the tiny dead town Revenant, Colorado. They bring with them their creators, those who grieve, and here their conflicts are resolved, one way or another.

There are many other examples, and it is a strength of the book that so many characters can not only be introduced, but have their stories fully told in an average-length novel. So now we have another talent to list, namely the author's ability to zero in on defining characteristics so precisely that, once you're done reading, you have enjoyed the story immensely and do not feel like you just read a resume.

Melanie Tem has a sagacious knack for making you cringe without throwing buckets of blood in your face. The result is *Revenant* is not macabre and it is not grotesque. It is deeply unsettling, and every bit as satisfying as her earlier books. I highly recommend it.

— Wayne Edwards

***Black Thorn, White Rose*, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, Morrow/AvoNova, Sept. 1994, 400 pp., \$22.00 hc (ISBN 0-688-13713-X)**

Black Thorn, White Rose is a collection of modern retellings of classic fairy tales along with an original story or two that fall into the somewhat ambiguous category of "fairy tale." This anthology follows last year's highly entertaining (and successful) *Snow White, Blood Red* and is compiled by the same editors. In reading this new collection, we are once again reminded of the original adult nature of what has evolved, over time and through heavy-handed editing, into children's stories. A "classic fairy tale" is really nothing more than folk story that has its roots in an oral tradition extending back hundreds (more than a thousand, in some cases) of years. While they often carry an underlying "moral" or mes-

sage, the themes of fairy tales are widely varied and not easily pigeonholed.

There are many explanations for the way fairy tales have been toned down in recent times, ranging from the nonchalant to the overtly puritan. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, though there is quite a lot of evidence to support the censorship argument, for it isn't only literature that has suffered over the years. Consider Michelangelo's fresco "The Last Judgment," parts of which were considered obscene and painted over on authority of the Council of Trent beginning in 1565, only one year after the artist's death. The restoration of this masterpiece didn't begin until more than four hundred years later.

Whatever the reason for the paling of folklore, the "restorative" trend is welcome. Unlike the recent work on Michelangelo's fresco, the stories in *Black Thorn, White Rose* do not seek to "fix" the tales on which they are based. Rather, they are new takes on old themes, told in steady, straightforward language that is compelling and graceful. You remember the original tale when you read the new one, but the familiarity does not distract you. Instead, it serves to enhance your enjoyment of *both* stories.

For the most part, the fairy tales on which the stories in *Black Thorn, White Rose* are based are different from those in the companion volume, *Snow White, Blood Red*. The new collection has fresh interpretations of such classic yarns as "Rumpelstiltskin," "Sleeping Beauty," "Gingerbread Man," and many others. An intriguing characteristic of both volumes is that some fairy tales ("Rumpelstiltskin" and "Sleeping Beauty" in *Black Thorn*) are given treatment by more than one author. The result is interesting and entertaining. The fact that each new version of the same basic theme has genuine merit and avoids redundancy speaks not only to the talent of the writers, but to the universal resiliency and appeal of the underlying tale. It is why fairy tales have survived for centuries, why, with each successive incarnation, they never seem to get old or outdated.

You know that you can rely on writers like Jane Yolen, Roger Zelazny, Peter Straub, and Nancy Kress, all contributors to this fine collection, to provide visions of wonder and

amazement, and the strength of their stories would be enough to carry an anthology that might be weak in other areas. But this one is not weak; there isn't a poor story in the lot. For something different from the usual fare, the harmonious blend of fantasy and horror that *Black Thorn, White Rose* affords the reader is welcome and graciously accepted.

— Wayne Edwards

***Desperate Measures*, by David Morrell, Warner, Sept. 1994, 408 pp., \$22.95 hc (ISBN 0-446-51791-7)**

Hang on tight, folks, David Morrell will give you one hell of a ride in *Desperate Measures*.

The book opens with Matthew Pittman, a newspaper obituary writer, sitting in his bathtub preparing to kill himself. He's lost his son to a rare form of bone cancer (as David Morrell lost his own son a few years ago), his wife has left him and remarried, and life pretty much sucks. He's paid back all his debts, public and private. He's quit his job at the paper and now has the Colt .45 in his mouth ready to pull the trigger, when the phone rings.

Worried that he's forgotten a debt, Pittman answers the phone. It's Burt, his ex-boss from the paper. Burt explains that the paper is going out of business in a week and that he really needs Matthew to give him eight days to help finish out the paper's run. Burt is the one person in the world to whom Matthew still feels indebted, so he reluctantly agrees.

His assignment is to write an obituary for a man who is still alive. The man is Jonathan Millgate, one of the "grand counselors." Pittman had investigated him before his life went into the toilet and found that he was one of the most powerful men in the government. The grand counselors have pretty much run the government, deciding foreign policy since the beginning of the Cold War.

The book kicks into high gear when Millgate is murdered. Pittman is accused and finds himself on the run not only from the police, but also from the true murderers. His bank account frozen by the authorities, his every move anticipated by the killers, Pittman races to prove his innocence.

Strange behavior for a man who, a few days earlier, planned to take his

own life. He tells himself that he wants to die his way at a time of his own choosing.

Having been an investigative reporter in the past proves quite useful. The skills Pittman has picked up from interviewing computer hackers, burglars, weapons specialists, etc., all work to his advantage as he teams with a young nurse, Jill Warren, and takes the manhunt to the killers, digging into their past to uncover their darkest secret—a secret that has cost many men their careers and even their lives.

Morrell uses short chapters that keep the pace racing along. You finish a chapter and figure, what the hell, one more chapter won't take long to read. Every scene grabs you and refuses to let go. Pretty soon, you discover you've finished the book.

The emotions Morrell brings into play—trying to find reasons to go on living when those you love are gone—hit home in a big way.

The suspense will keep you on the edge of your seat wishing you could read faster to find out what happens, but also wishing the book didn't have to end. The protagonists are real people and we care what happens to them.

What more can you ask from a book?

If there are any minor quibbles here, some readers may think it's too convenient for Pittman to come into a situation and then remember an interview he'd done years before. For me, this worked. When are you going to remember an old interview? When you're confronted with a problem that jars your memory, of course.

So if you're in the mood for a fun, fast-paced, inventive action thriller, don't miss *Desperate Measures*. Highly recommended.

—Gary Jonas

Touch Wood: Narrow Houses Volume 2, edited by Peter Crowther, London: Little, Brown & Co., 372 pp., £15.99 hc (ISBN 0-316-90732-4)

For years now people much more knowledgeable than I have been theorizing about what makes British dark fantasy different from its American counterpart. To those for whom the jury is still out on this subject, I strongly recommend reading *Touch Wood: Narrow Houses Volume 2* because it not only makes that difference wildly evident

but manages to combine those differences to impressive effect.

A quick explanation: The difference, in my opinion, between UK and American dark fantasy is that a majority of modern British writers in the field cut their teeth on DF literature, where the majority of modern American DF writers were weaned on film and television and less on the written word; one need only to read a story by Robert Aickman (whose spirit very much permeates these pages), then one by, say, the former team of Skipp and Spector in order to see the disparity in approaches (and I fully admit that both are extreme examples of what I'm talking about). American writers tend to lean more toward action and fast pace with the occasional grace note thrown in for good measure, while British writers are more predisposed to allow a story to unfold at a leisurely pace, allowing time for subtlety and reflection and what Dan Simmons called "observing little things in a big way." Unfortunately, too many publishers, editors, and readers equate the word "leisurely" with "slow" and "boring"—a direct result, methinks, of allowing film and TV to dictate American culture.

Which, again, makes the success of *Touch Wood* doubly baffling. Both the British and American approaches (each of which I like tremendously when done well) are represented in this hefty collection, and though the differences in approach become glaringly evident by the halfway mark, they serve to enrich rather than to detract from the enjoyment.

Bookending the collection are a pair of deeply eerie, surrealistic pieces from, respectively, t. Winter-Damon and D.F. Lewis; "Touch Wood," a superb invocation piece, and "Splints," a feverish and equally superb piece of psychological self-exorcism. The stories that appear between them create a startling momentum and, by their unpredictable variety in approaches, manage to bring the collection full-circle; I came away feeling that I hadn't so much read an anthology as experienced a twenty-nine movement concerto.

Like with any collection, I had my favorites—though I hasten to add that even those stories which didn't work for me (and there were a few) offer many rewards for the patient reader.

Colin Greenwood, Adam Corbin

Fusco, Kristine Kathryn Rusch (whose contribution, "Heart Flesh," is a study in grief and loneliness so exquisite you may very well be shaking by its final, luminous paragraph), Paul Lewis, Charles de Lint, Simon Ings, William Relling, Jr., and Thomas F. Monteleone all offer outstanding tales; Lewis and Monteleone deserve particular attention because their stories demonstrate, better than any other pair in the collection, just how the balance between the British and American approaches to DF can be successfully struck and maintained.

Lewis's "The Ten O'Clock Horses" is, on the surface, a tale about a village where the adults have come up with a unique way to make sure their children behave and are in bed by ten p.m., but look a little deeper and you'll find a disturbing cautionary fable about what can happen when adults abuse their children's trust and power of belief.

Monteleone's "The Wager" is the most deceptively "commercial" story of the collection. Taking his cue from Anton Checkov, Monteleone spins a ripping yarn about two men, long-time rivals, who are members of an exclusive old-boy's club, and what happens when one of their competitions gets way out of hand. (You would do well to remember that the term "narrow house" is British slang for "coffin.") The second half of this marvelous story creates an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia—not an easy feat with only words. This story is as much about the dangers of ego as it is a study in obsession, and it contains two characters who may very well be the archetypal Monteleone nemeses.

With *Touch Wood*, Peter Crowther and company have given readers a richly literate, grimly satisfying collection of tales. Though all of the stories focus on superstition, the theme never grows old or tiresome—in fact, the opposite effect is achieved; you feel as if the theme has never before been explored so deftly. The collection is fresh, eerie, and surprising, with more than a few echoes of Aickman and Hawthorne. In a time when more and more anthologies seem to have been slapped together at a moment's notice, with no care given to internal momentum or thematic progression, *Touch Wood* is a buried treasure chest of rewards; thoughtful, frightening, genuinely macabre in many places, and ...

oddly optimistic. One can hardly stand the wait for number three.

—Gary A. Braunbeck

***Blood Moon*, by Ed Gorman, St. Martin's Press, 264 pp., \$20.95 hc (ISBN 0-312-10943-1)**

Early on in *Blood Moon* Ed Gorman manages to accomplish in one paragraph what David Lynch has thus far failed to do in his last four films—peel away the veil worn by Small Town America (in this case, the ironically named New Hope, Iowa) to reveal the rat's nest of shuddery, unsavory ugliness that squirms below:

Here we were in the rolling prairie night, all these red and white emergency lights whirling around in the gloom, all these farmers and small-town folks standing in the gravel road partly thrilled and partly horrified by what had happened here tonight. I wondered what the birds made of all this, or the wolves running in the hills, or the owl in the old barn down the hill. Just one more dumbass human thing, the animals were probably thinking. These humans didn't even kill each other for the only reason that justified killing—survival—these humans killed each other for money and sex and jealousy. They didn't make any sense, these humans, and owl and wolf and bird would be glad when the lights and the noise and the sweaty intense fascination were all taken away and the land given back to the moon and the clouds and the fast running creeks, that sense of order and oneness and peace ...

Such are the ruminations going through the mind of Robert Payne, former Psychological Profiler for the FBI, as he stands amidst the aftermath of a brutal, bloody murder. The victim is his client, who hired Payne to track the psychopath who murdered her young daughter. Payne has only a list of names given to his client by a private investigator who was about to crack the case—until he, too, was murdered.

After reading his last novel (the British edition of *Shadow Games*, due out in the states later this year), I thought it wasn't possible for Ed Gorman to get any better.

Big surprise, I was wrong.

At first glance, *Blood Moon* seems to be Ed Gorman's contribution to the

ever-growing and infinitely tiresome subgenre of serial killer fiction; but where many writers of contemporary suspense tend to romanticize the serial killer—detailing his obsessions, his methods, his painful past/psychological deterioration/delusions/abuse history/migraine headaches/nerve-wracking traffic offenses *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseum*—Gorman wisely (and refreshingly) concentrates on the effects his crimes have on the victims and their families. When dealing with the killer himself (who casts sickening dispersions on the term “sub-human”), Gorman never flinches; sure, we see his past unfold, we are party to the brutality he's suffered (especially in the barbaric prison sequences), and we see that, in an odd, twisted sort of way, he's capable of tenderness—but Gorman never once tries to elicit sympathy from the reader. Yes, his killer has been abused but it does not compare with, let alone justify, the monstrous acts he commits and has been committing since he was a child.

I can already hear the nitpickers out there complaining that we never really find out *why* the killer does what he does, but in the world of *Blood Moon* the reasons why don't matter a damn; like Payne himself—who has long since come to grips with his finally taking sides not with the experts who want to study such killers but with the victims and their survivors who want such killers stopped, period—readers will quickly find they don't much care, either: the monster is out there, and somewhere a frightened child cowers under the monster's hand, and the monster must be expunged.

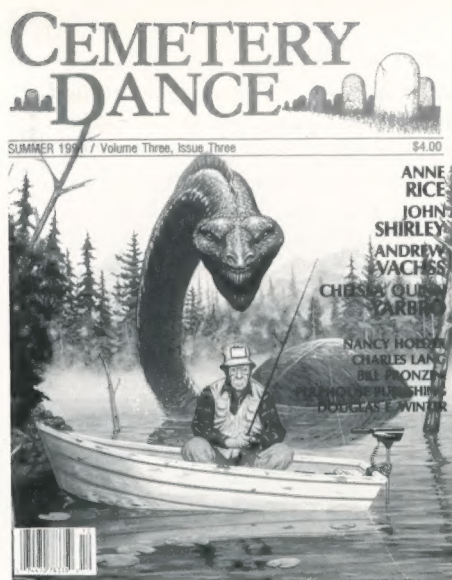
Unlike other serial killer novels where the victims are merely carrion paraded forth so the writer can splatter the pages with blood and torture and screams, *Blood Moon* goes to great lengths to make sure the reader feels the grief of the victims' families, the terror of the victims themselves, and the absolute, soul-shattering sense of helplessness of those who try to stop the monster and are foiled at every turn. (Not the least of its accomplishments is making the reader care desperately for the fate of a little girl who is never seen; despite her physical absence from the story, the girl becomes a fully developed, three-dimensional character. I've now read the book twice and I still can't figure out how Gorman did it.)

This novel wrenches the reader's emotions around with astounding ease, going from hard-edged bitterness to subtly hysterical humor, then from graphic, in-your-face violence to moments of shimmering, poetic beauty. Its violence and pulse-quickening suspense aside, *Blood Moon* is, without a doubt, one of the most emotionally painful novels I've ever read.

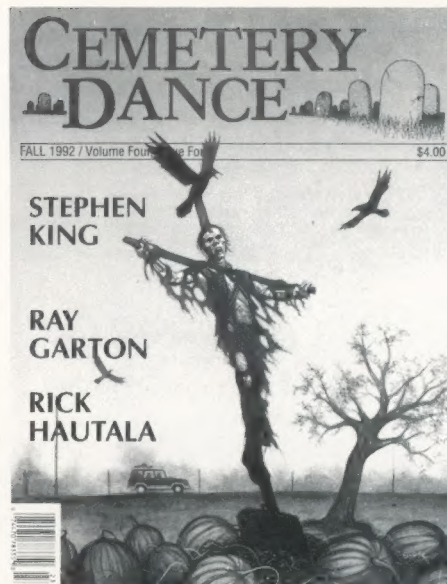
Understand this: There are two things that I as a reader do not succumb to easily—surprise and tears. As to the first, I cut my teeth on William Goldman, Elmore Leonard, and John D. MacDonald, so I don't surprise easily. *Blood Moon* not only surprised me three times, it twice blind-sided me. As to the second, having lived in the Midwest all of my life I am very much acquainted with those sad, beaten-down types of totally compromised individuals whose blue-collar defeatism dominates the consciousness of the lower middle-class; I grew up in it and, believe me, it can empty out your spirit in a blink. Gorman seems to know this same kind of compromised person intimately, and brilliantly embodies her in the person of Eve McNally, the mother of a little girl the killer kidnaps. Payne (what a sly moniker that is for this likable, complex character) and Eve have a scene together toward the end of the novel which left me, literally, with tears in my eyes and an ache in my chest—*goddamn* did I want to see the killer brought down and brought down hard after Payne left this tragic woman to the cold loneliness of her life. The novel is worth its price and your time for this scene alone. Then grab something and hang on for what has to be one of the most genuinely *scary* finales of recent years.

As you've undoubtedly noticed, I've been tap dancing around the specifics of the plot. So sue me. I found this novel to be devastating and don't want to chance saying anything that might blunt the effect for you. This is the kind of novel that, while providing all the fast-paced suspense and sharp characterization Gorman is known for, will haunt you for days, maybe even weeks afterward with its sweat-inducing suspense, its eloquent pain, its raw anger and unflinching look at the ugliness of a sick mind, and, most memorable of all, a poetic emotional resonance that is all too rare in modern

Continued on page 89



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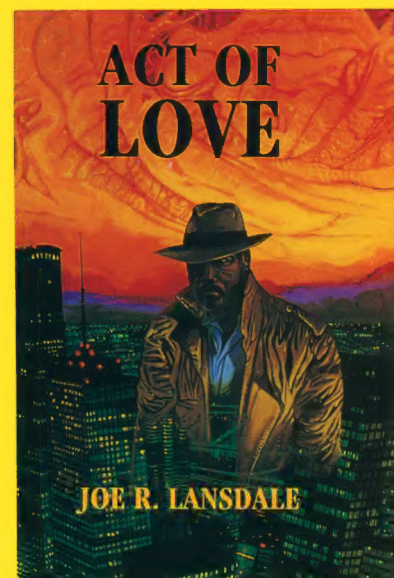
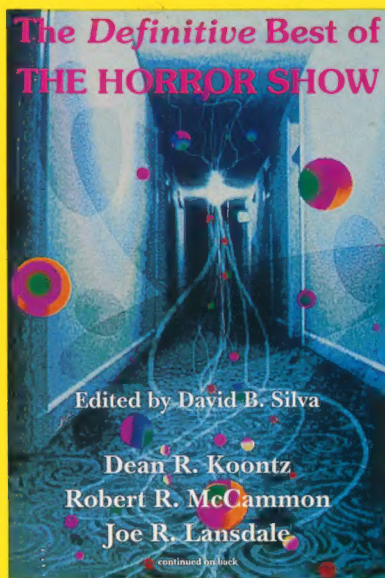
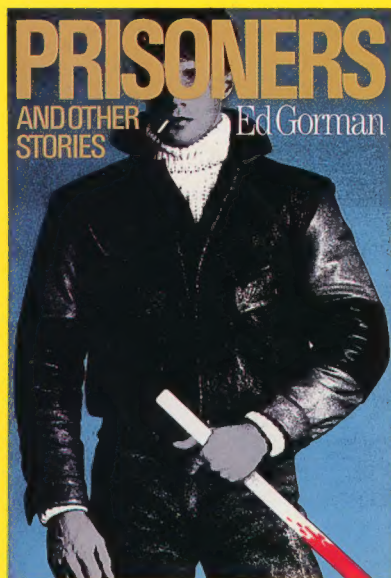
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